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THIS SON OF VULCAN.

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THIS SON OF VULCAN

BY

WALTER BESANT AND JAMES RICE



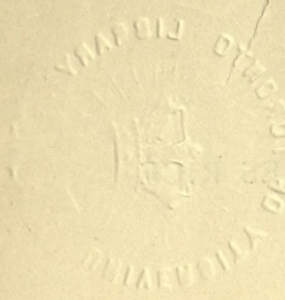
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THIS SON OF VULCAN.

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# THIS SON OF VULCAN.

## PROLOGUE.

### I.

THE place is Esbrough, a rising—not yet risen—town in the North of England. The time is eleven o'clock, on the last night of the year 1849.

Myles Cuolahan, standing on the steps of the Packhorse and Talbot public-house, recognises his acquaintance, Mr. Paul Bayliss, who is passing down the High Street on his way home. Seizing him in a very friendly manner by the arm, he gives him "Good evening."

"Ay, ay! good-night, Myles; good-night," says Bayliss, trying to pass on, and with the roughness of one who does not wish to be stopped; but the strong fingers that clutch the sleeve of his rough pilot-coat hold him too tightly; he cannot slip from their grasp.

"Ye'll not have the heart to say no to a glass of just whatever ye like best with Myles Cuolahan this night, Mither Bayliss; an' if ye do' I'll not belave ye, nor be the mane man to tak' ye at your word nayther. So there!" he cries, making a move of a yard or so in the direction of mine host of the Packhorse's snug red-curtained parlour.

There is a suspicion of mellowness in the tone of voice in which Bayliss's captor says this; and Bayliss replies—

"But you must let me say no, and thank ye with it, Cuolahan, lad."

"It's New Year's Eve," urges Myles, never relaxing his grip of Bayliss's coat sleeve, "an' devil's the bit o' luck ye'll

have the year to come, Misther Bayliss, if ye don't have one glass of whisky wi' me on this present occasion."

A shrewd observer, noting the look on the Englishman's face as the Irishman said this, would probably have inferred that the goddess Fortune could not well treat Paul Bayliss worse in the year to come than she had done in the year past. Which, indeed, was nearly true.

"Ye'll come into the Packhorse?" said Myles.

"No, no, Cuolahan," Bayliss persisted; "I'll not take another glass this year; and I'll just remind you, my lad, you've got the walk to Back End before you, and if you like to walk with me as far as I go, I'll be glad of your company; and if not, I'll wish you a happy new year when it comes, and say good-night."

"Tell that to the marines for a tale, Misther Bayliss," cried Myles; "ye'll not be for Back End yet."

"Yes, but I shall," said Bayliss, sinking his voice to the tone of a confidential whisper. "You see, Myles, if I'm out many seconds after our kitchen clock strikes eleven, either on New Year's Eve or any other eve, we don't want vinegar with our cabbage for a week after. My sister Barbara is, I suppose, about as near perfection as a mortal Methodist can be. Now you understand."

He tapped Myles playfully on the shoulder, and freed himself from his grasp.

Under the lamp at the street-door of the Packhorse and Talbot, Myles Cuolahan winked a wink of passing comprehension. Then he responded to Bayliss's invitation to walk home with him.

"Misther Bayliss," he said, "I'd come out just to take a momentary peep at the stars and all the other heavenly bodies—including, av coorse, the planets and the comets—when who should I see but yourself, looking as brave as the best of them; an' what would I do in dacency but ask you to step in and dhrink a glass with me? It's hard that you won't, on you and on me. But I am not the boy to be after getting you into trouble with a lady—least of all Miss Barbara Bayliss. Bless her purty eyes!—if they are purty,

which I don't rightly remember. An', thanking you all the same, I'll not want for company home as far as I go, an' farther. Johnny's inside"—pointing over his shoulder. "Somebody 'll have to see Johnny home to his own door, an' it's likely I'll be the man."

As Cuolahan finished speaking, there was a shuffling noise of footsteps on the stone floor of the passage. Both Myles and Bayliss looked round, as the Company, in the form of "P. Bayliss & Co., Ironfounders, General and Jobbing Smiths, &c. &c., Holcotes, near Esbrough," came slowly but surely into the full light of the lamp which hung over the door of the inn, and advertised boldly, in red glass and white letters, those neat wines and genuine spirits the said Company loved too well.

The mood of the Company, as convoyed by two boon fellows he reached the threshold, was thickly sportive.

"What—sort—of—night . . . eh, Myles?" he asked, in seven very deliberate jerks, before he steadied himself against the door-post.

"Hould your whisht, Johnny: here's Bayliss!" said Cuolahan, in his friend's ear.

The Company, whose faculties were not at their brightest, had failed to notice the presence of the head of the firm. Cuolahan's hint fell short of its purpose also; for Johnny Armstrong only said, "Eh?" with a very wide sense of interrogation generally. "We're going down to the Yorkshire Grey. Let him come if he likes."

"Johnny," said Myles, giving his friend a good shake, "you don't hear me. Look round you, man; it's Misther Bayliss."

Johnny being now made to understand, suddenly lost his jovial tone, and became absurdly dignified.

He looked sulkily at his partner, and resented with some spirit the uncalled-for innuendo conveyed in the offer of a friendly arm to support him.

But his legs most inopportunately spoke the truth in the plainest language; and having served him this shabby trick, left him at the mercy of Cuolahan and Bayliss, who, taking his arm in theirs, turned his back for him on the Yorkshire Grey



and the convoy who had brought him from the parlour of the Packhorse, and walked him off in the direction of Marsh Road, a mile and a half away in the outskirts of Esbrough. Their way led through the town, where, though it was eleven o'clock, the shops were ablaze with gas, and thronged with customers.

For it is Friday night, and the streets, which at Christmas time are almost like a fair, are crowded with buyers and lookers-on; people with baskets, and good folk who have come out to stare about them, see the sights in the shop-windows, enjoy the bustle, hear the politic patter of Cheap Jack, and spend divers pence, one at a time, for the privilege of an interview with the "Giant American Sisters, the Fattest Women in the World," the largest horse ever known, the curious blue ring tailed "Gorilla Ape from Central Africay," and other vaunted celebrities of the market-place.

Being still Christmas time, everything to eat is bedecked with holly, and the darkest shops are bright with unaccustomed lights. In the by-streets, New Year's Eve is kept in every house where there are children or old people: kept mostly in the simple fashion of something extra to eat and drink. In the public-houses, that orthodox tribe, the toppers, who neglect no privileged occasion of rejoicing, keep the feast after their own manner, and as they keep every feast, saint's day or holiday, either of State or Church, by making it a day more than usually unholy. It is a night when the pulse of the noisy little manufacturing town, always quick and active, beats fierce and feverish. For generally, as becomes a young town whose future is all before it, by eleven o'clock its lights are put out, and the workers are in bed and asleep, and nothing is left stirring but the policeman who keeps watch and ward.

The stream of people in the streets is already setting homeward, but not before the butchers' shops have been pretty nearly cleared of the great piles of yellow and red meat, on which Esbrough housewives look with loving but critical eyes; not before the grocer, wiping his brow, has remarked, with a sober joy that will lend a brightness to next Sunday's services,

the lightness of his shelves and the fulness of his till; not before the fruiterer has got rid of those pyramids of golden oranges, bursting figs, brown nuts, and rosy apples, which will form the children's feast of the morrow.

As Cuolahan and Bayliss, with their staggering charge, pass through the full streets, they meet plenty of people they know. But Johnny Armstrong's ways are familiar, and they only remark to each other—

"It's Johnny: they're taking him home."

Observe, that it is a bad sign when a man past thirty is called by the diminutive Christian name that belongs to a boy. Armstrong the toper—for he had no other occupation—was, with all the world except his wife, "Johnny," and nothing else. In the last ten years he had been steadily drinking, drinking and singing songs, had done no manner of work, got no money, and cared to get none. People began to whisper that Johnny Armstrong was coming to the end of his resources; it was even said that he had begun to raise money by means of the house with the three golden balls. And his wife was growing more and more careful as the inevitable day of destitution drew near.

"It's Johnny Armstrong going home. Happy New Year, all three! Johnny's drunk as usual. A pretty New Year he'll spend, poor fellow!"

Ay! another New Year's Day would be his. For it was the last time he was to stagger home.

Johnny Armstrong had sung his last song, smoked his last pipe, drained his last glass, and was staggering blindly down the street to meet his miserable doom—drunk.

They left the town behind them and walked along the road in the open country. In the fields it was a clear, cold Christmas night; the stars as bright as on that eve when the angels sang their song—the only song of heaven ever heard on earth, and the shepherds listened and wondered with hearts that burned within them; one of those nights when the world seems to have forgotten its troubles and to be at peace for ever; when you might wander abroad like the great Sheikh Abraham, listening and waiting for the word of the Lord.

To him it came in a Voice; to us it comes in a restful calm and trust.

But the holy stillness of the night found no reflection in the hearts of the three men as they walked along the frost-bound road. The one idea that possessed Armstrong was that of making Bayliss believe that nobody was so much surprised at the unreasonable refusal of his legs to carry him steadily as their owner was himself. As if Bayliss was ignorant of his partner's weaknesses! Bayliss, cogitating of the hopelessly insolvent state of the firm of which he was the head and Armstrong the tail, speculated on his chance of getting rid of Johnny without an hour's delay, and then wheedling his sister out of another loan; or making a new appearance in the *Gazette*. Myles Cuolahan's conscience smote him hard for having left an appreciative company of particularly jolly fellows just as the ball was rolling fastest, and his sense of what was decent in the way of behaviour being thus outraged by his own wilful act, the light-hearted Celt was as gloomy as Myles could be. So, without having interchanged many words by the way, they leave Johnny at the wicket-gate of his little garden at Back End. He staggers up the path alone. His wife, who is waiting up for him, hearing his well-known footsteps on the stones outside, springs to her feet and runs to open the door. It is no new sight to her, this of her husband's slow and heavy entry. She is not surprised when he sits at the table, and, leaning his head upon his hands, falls sound asleep. She goes on quickly with her work, her thin, nimble fingers setting stitch after stitch. Not even a sigh—not even a reproach: for this wife has passed all that. She is tied to a drunkard, and she knows that her fate is beyond all hope. Other men may change. The passionate man may grow calm and long-suffering; the wilful man may listen kindly to the voice of reason; the selfish man may—I have never known a case, but he may—learn to feel sympathy for others; the cruel man become softened; the malicious man may become generous; the nervous, contented; the improvident man may take to the ways of thrift: but the drunkard never improves.



For him there is but one remedy ; and since he seldom takes it, there is but one end—misery, shame, an unhonoured and premature old age. Look at Johnny Armstrong as he sleeps in his chair ! In those swelling veins, that red and bloated face, that hair grey too soon, would you recognise the handsome young fellow, the last of the Armstrong race, owners of Esbrough for seven hundred years, who brought home with him, ten years ago, his bonny bride from the Border country, where the Armstrongs first came from ? How handsome he was then ! How hopeful was the household ! How full of projects was its master for the restoration of the fallen Armstrong fortunes ! And for her, his wife, who can tell the tragedy of a life wasted and hopes shattered ? There is no tragedy in history, no drama of the Greek stage, grander, more sublime, more full of pity and terror, than that of a woman's life, as the hero of her youthful love slowly, bit by bit—not letting fall a borrowed drapery, but adding others to his own features, putting out new and hideous limbs as a tree puts forth new branches—develops into a monster like the laidly worm of Dunstanburgh. It is a tragedy which has never been written, perhaps because we see it before us every day. Some day, another Shakespeare shall put it on the stage for us.

“I am going to bed, John,” she said at last, as the clock struck one, shaking him by the shoulder.

He looked up, shook his head, and went to sleep again. She put away her work, raked out the last embers of the fire, took away the candle, and went upstairs.

At two, Johnny Armstrong woke again, stupid, cold, trying to think.

“Bayliss,” he said—“Bayliss is to come to-morrow to pay his rent.” Then he struck a match and looked about for the candle. Then he slipped something from his pocket and stooped to find it. The light dropped out of his hand, his head grew heavy as lead, and he lay along the floor insensible and breathing stertorously.

Presently a little wreath of light smoke crept stealthily

upwards, as if avoiding the sleeper's face ; then there came a dull-red glow, visible, had Johnny Armstrong's eyes been open, which they were not, between the boards of the carpetless floor where the lighted match had fallen ; then the glow brightened into a broad light with crackling and sputtering of wood, for the laths of the ceiling were on fire, and in the kitchen below the flame was running out tongues of fire here and there, that caught the wainscoting of the old house, crept behind the wall with the whispered hiss of a serpent, and mounted higher and higher, intent to destroy, but resolved upon silence till the moment for decisive action arrived. The woman slept upstairs, dreaming of her Northumbrian home or of the unborn child.

Downstairs her husband, Johnny Armstrong, lay snoring loudly, too drunk for any dreams.

Fire ! fire ! The flames were roaring and screaming as they devoured the last rafter of Johnny Armstrong's cottage, and what had been, an hour before, a man with his infinite possibilities was now an impossible heap of ashes, useless for ever !

When the clock struck three, the terrified people, some dozen or so from the neighbouring works, were carrying to the nearest place of shelter, the works themselves, for no other house stood near Johnny Armstrong's, the one thing saved from the fire—his wife. Two or three women followed the men as they bore her, helpless and swooning, from the scene of the disaster. The town was asleep. Too late help came. The bright light in the sky above Armstrong's house had quite faded out before the engine started from Esbrough.

"Lay her in the foundry—it is the only place," said one.

They spoke in whispers ; for in face of a great calamity, we are in a kind of church, conscious of our own weakness, recognising, in spite of ourselves, the dangers that surround us. She opened her eyes and moaned. They made haste to lay her down on some rough bed extemporised out of workmen's coats. It was a long, low shed, lit here and there by flaming gas jets, roofed with a great glass arch, of which half the panes were broken, those, namely, at the upper end

where the furnace stood, and through the broken glass you might watch, if you looked up—though these men never did look up—the tranquil stars gazing upon the scene. And you might fancy they gazed with a sort of curiosity, as if here was a noticeable thing in the world's history. Noticeable indeed, though it happens every day, for a child was to be born, and a woman was to die. The working-men never looked round, hearing and seeing nothing but the surly roaring of the furnace, and watching for the moment to begin the pouring out. In front of the fire, dressed in some rough wraps, kept wet, were those whose duty it was to guide the streaming mass of molten metal into the ladles, great iron buckets with huge handles, which stood ready to receive it when the time should come; and close at hand were the moulds, long prisons as they seemed, cut regularly in the floor.

Johnny Armstrong's wife they had laid at the other end of the shed. She was left alone with the women behind a rude screen of canvas and shawls. Presently, these gathered close round her under the gas flame over their heads.

"John," she murmured faintly, with lips that grew whiter every moment, "John, dear John, don't drink it all; leave something for the baby and me—leave something, John."

John would drink no more; but that she did not know. They laid her baby by her side. She revived for a moment to kiss the new-born cheek, so soft, so fragile; then she looked round her, and saw the women bending over her. All was strange to her in these last moments when life was ebbing away.

"It's a boy, dear," said one; "a beautiful boy."

"Try to bear up, poor thing!" said another, in kindly accents.

But she lay back on the rough bed quite still, and they saw she was dead.

"Let be; let be!" said a man, Myles Cuolahan, no other; his face was blackened, his hair singed, and clothes torn, and his hand bleeding. "My Biddy will take the child. 'Twill



do instead of the little one we buried last week. God bless him !”

Presently came the doctor, too late. By this time the iron, molten, was pouring out from the furnace in a white stream into the ladles. As they dragged them to the moulds it streamed across the floor in rivulets of silver.

“Strong !” cried the woman who held the child ; “he’s the strongest baby I ever handled. Give me another pin, and he’ll be beautiful. To think, poor lamb, that his mother only just had time to set her eyes on him !”

“The mother is dead,” said the doctor, though they knew that already. “Poor thing ! the fright has killed her. Where is her drunken husband ?”

Nobody answered for a while.

“Myles Cuolahan saved her,” said one, pointing to the shrinking hero, who had that night performed a deed worthy to be chronicled among the gests even of the London Fire Brigade ; “but her husband was not in the bedroom.”

“Perhaps he never went home.”

“But he did ; he was taken home to his own door.”

“Then he”——

“He’s dead,” said Myles. “Burned in the fire, he is. Poor Johnny Armstrong ! The drink was in him, and he hadn’t the sinse to get out.”

The doctor shook his head and looked at the speaker, who turned away his face uneasily, for he read in the doctor’s eyes the warning to himself that was left unspoken.

“Come, come !” he said, turning to the woman who held the child, “we must see after the living. Now then, Mrs. Cuolahan, let us . . . ”—he glanced at the furnace, the streaming metal, the men of the night shift, the lurid light that played upon the poor helpless bundle in the woman’s arms, and hesitated for a moment—“now then, let us look at this Son of Vulcan.”

## II.

FIVE and twenty years ago ill news flew as fast at Esbrough as at places more and less important. But it was nearly breakfast-time with Paul Bayliss when the news of Johnny Armstrong's death reached him: for the simple reason that nobody thought of starting off to fetch him, in the excitement of the fire and the anxiety of the scene that followed it. So Bayliss snored while his partner and his partner's house were perishing. But the morning brought the news to him. A puddler from the works came over to his sister's house to tell him, as it was argued among the men that he was one of those who "ought to know." Not that it was felt he could do anything in particular pending the coroner's inquest, but, in general terms, the opinion was expressed that he should be told. The volunteer who arrived with the message did not even get thanks for his pains. Bayliss was too much moved by his news to be punctilious in the matter of the minor civilities. In one second he was out of bed. In six minutes he was striding along at a swinging pace to the scene of the catastrophe.

We have to see more of him, and may describe him at once.

Paul Bayliss is now a man of about thirty years of age—the same age as his partner, Johnny Armstrong, dead and gone. He is a man rather below the middle height, fresh-coloured, healthy, vigorous of appearance. Perhaps his eyes are too small and too close together; perhaps it is his chin, which is coarse and full; perhaps it is something about his mouth, which is large, and generally a little open; perhaps it is the redness of his hair and whiskers; perhaps it is his big, heavy nose; perhaps it is the presence of all these features together, which gives the impression that Paul Bayliss would be a man of passably good looks, if something were not in the way. He is not a handsome man, nor is he even prepossessing. On the other hand, he has a free, open way with him. He laughs loudly; he tells a story; he is always ready to say the proper thing that stands for sym-

pathy ; he can sing a good song ; he can drink with any man of his inches, and does too, when he gets the chance of doing it for nothing. He is affable to every one. He never forgets a face, to commit which fault has brought thousands of short-sighted men to grief. He pays his way as far as he can, and would wish to owe no man anything. And yet, with all these admirable qualities, Paul is not popular. To be sure, he has had, as he is never tired of saying, luck dead against him. To be only thirty, and to have failed as a blacksmith and implement-maker, the trade to which he was brought up—as a farmer and seedsman, the trade which he tried next—and as an auctioneer and estate agent ; and now, to be in a bad way as a farmer and jobbing smith, shows a malignity of fate against which few men could struggle. At the same time, there are not wanting those who say that Paul Bayliss has only himself to thank ; that he had good chances, and that, if he could have kept out of the way of Johnny Armstrong, and the seductions of his convivial set, he would not have failed in any of his undertakings, and might have been a well-to-do man by this time. But with all this, he was still a hopeful man, and had one answer always ready for the “candid” remarks of friends : “You wait till I turn up trumps.” To the friends it seemed that the turn of his suit never came. Candour compelled them to express a pious doubt that it ever would come. Such was Paul Bayliss at the time my story begins. We left him, with busy mind and quick strides, making the best of his way to the hot ashes of Johnny Armstrong’s roof-tree.

A mile on his way was a point where three roads met. He came to a stop. After all, four blackened walls and a heap of charred débris could have nothing more to tell him than he knew already. Myles Cuolahan, on the other hand, might know a good deal more. He had learned from the messenger the brave part played by the Irishman, and he took the road that led to Myles’s habitation. He came presently to a row of small two-storey houses, all exactly alike, all with green doors, green shutters, white blinds, only some of them whiter than others ; all bearing an air of meekness



and dependence, which proclaimed the fact that they were occupied by the employés at the works. Even at this early hour, their tenants, heads of the families, were away at the factory. The door of the first, like all the rest, stood hospitably back, and opened, as is the practice of such doors, upon the living-room. In this room—his throat tied round with a red silk handkerchief, dressed in a thick pea-jacket, rusty black hat, and a dilapidated pair of trousers, such duds and gleanings in the way of clothes as his friends could lend him to replace the garments destroyed by the fire—sat Myles Cuolahan. Myles—a little man, thin and spare, with a sharp, clear-cut nostril, black eyes as bright as beads and as clear as a bell, crisp curly black hair, thin cheeks, and a long straight chin—was sitting on an inverted box, his own pack-box, in front of the fire; in his lips was a pipe, but it was empty; and in his arms—Bayliss noticed it with great surprise—hugged by about the biggest pair of hands that ever belonged to man, was a baby; and to the baby—a tiny creature, wrapped and swathed in flannel, with its little face sleepily turned upwards—Myles was singing, in a high-toned voice that might have been heard miles off, some sort of nonsense, a reminiscence of his native country and his own childish days:—

“ A turf and a clod  
Spells Nabuchod;  
A knife and a razor  
Spells Nabuchodnezzar;  
A silver spoon and a gold ring  
Spells Nabuchodnezzar the king;  
An old pair of slippers, and a new pair of shoes,  
Spells Nabuchodnezzar the king of the Jews.”

As for the tune, it was a queer old Irish melody. Moore never heard it, fortunately, and so you will not find it in those five big volumes, where there is so much sweet old music, and so much sugary, brand-new sentiment. I heard an imitation of it myself the other day, played and sung by a young lady, to some affecting words about love and parting, which made me laugh, because I thought of Myles and Nabuchod.

He beat time to the music with his right hand, keeping the left leg a foot and a half or so above the ground, so as to preserve the equilibrium of the baby. Paul Bayliss moved softly towards him.

“ ‘ A turf and a clod spells Nabuchod.’ ”

Thim's Irish hieroglyphics, Masther Johnny Armstrong. There's Egyptian hieroglyphics, too; but I'll tell ye all about thim when you get older and I get wiser. Faith, now, ye see, there's room for improvement for both of us. Don't shut your eyes again, ye little divil. The strongest babby I ever see. Keep 'em wide open, for manners, while I'm talking to ye. And never a cry since ye was born! Why don't ye cry, thin, with your father burned to a cinder, and nothing better, Lord forgive us! than a handful of sut and ashes, and yer mother lying in her cowl'd coffin, ye ungrateful little divil.

‘ A knife and a razor spells Nabuchodnez-zar.’ ”

Bayliss had not made his entrance heard. He now stepped up to Myles, and touched him on the shoulder.

“ Cuolahan!”

The Irishman, startled, dropped his left leg, and brought up his right with a sudden jerk that caught the infant, fortunately, in the safest place possible, and threw it a good foot or so into the air. Myles caught it cleverly in his two great open hands.

“ Bedad, now, Paul Bayliss, 'tis easy to see ye're not a married man. Stealin' on a man in that secret way, when he's got a few hours' old babby in his arms, and his wife washin' up, and the babby might have been bruk, and kilt. Then where should we be?—where should we be, I axes you, Paul Bayliss? The beaks sitting on us—six months only, and no hard labour, for Myles Cuolahan, licensed hawker, in consideration of his excellent character—six years, and the treadmill, for Paul Bayliss, Esquire, because he's such an unlucky divil. But sit down, Paul; sit down, and have a dhrink in memory of the poor departed. Johnny's no more, Paul; the Co.'s come to an end intirely. Here's

all that's left of him. Biddy won't cry over the child, for fear of bad luck."

Bayliss shook his head mournfully.

"Ye've heard, av coorse, what 'tis with poor Johnny. Why, 'tis murder, Paul, or next door to it, becuse a man can't be hanged for murdherin' himself. There can't even be a funeral, becuse there's nothing left to bury. They wouldn't do that, not even in poor ould Ireland—God bless her! No, sir; the base Saxon tyrants"—

"Never mind the Saxons, Myles. Tell me all about Armstrong."

"Lord rest his soul for a good, honest, dare-devil chap that never refused his glass!" Myles heaved a natural sigh.

"We tuk him home safe to his own door, you and me, and then he sets fire to the house and himself, and every-thing's burnt up. All the sticks and the beautiful ould pictures he was so fond of, the pictures of the ould Armstrongs; and the poor wife's dead with this little spalpeen here, nothing at all saved for him; and I'm here, wasting my time nursing of him, and that's all about it. Paul, it's lucky for Johnny that it was at Christmastide he died, for blessed Peter leaves the doors of heaven wide open till Twelfth Night, and no questions axed. We're six nights off that. Johnny 'll be in by this, praise the Lord! and plenty of time to spare."

A curious expression came over Bayliss's face. But just then Mrs. Cuolahan appeared at the door, and he spoke to her. An Irish girl, bright-faced and rosy-cheeked, some five-and-twenty years old. She looked inquiringly at her husband.

"It's Paul Bayliss, Mary, and he's come to see after his friend and partner Johnny Armstrong, dead, poor chap!"

"Friend, were you?" she replied. "Then you might have done him the good turn to keep him away from the dhrink. Partners in what, were you? was it in the whisky?"

"Hould your tongue, Biddy! With poor Johnny and his wife dead as an ould turf," said Myles; "and about as much of him left, more's the pity."

"If you're a friend," went on the woman, "you'll give a



Christian burial to his wife. It's hard on her, poor respectable woman, toiling and slaving for the babby that was to come; hard on her to have nothing but a pauper's funeral."

"Ay," said Paul, "it's hard. Was nothing saved from the fire?"

"Nothing," said Myles.

"Come to the cottage with me," returned Paul, in whose face the strange expression still dwelt. "Come to the cottage, and let us look at the ruins."

The two walked away to the roofless and burnt-out wreck, and Bayliss, getting inside the ruins, began poking about with his stick among the hot and smoking embers.

There were charred ends of timber, bits of broken pottery, glass melted down and run in shapeless heaps, metal also melted, but not a scrap of anything whole. As for papers, these, of course, were all gone together.

"Nothing saved"—he spoke to himself, not to Myles—"not a scrap of paper; not a vestige of anything left."

"Sorrur a bit of paper at all, at all."

"I shall go to Esbrough, and see what is to be done," said Bayliss. "No, no, don't come with me; I can't talk now. This has been a great shock to me."

He left the Irishman standing outside the ruins, and strode off down the road.

Now, this man, who had had so many failures and disappointments, whose appearance in the Bankruptcy Court was an event regularly looked for and anticipated by his friends, was, up to this moment, one of the most honest creatures in the whole world. He had never robbed, defrauded, stolen, nor cheated. Simply a plain ne'er-do-well. Temptation assailed him, doubtless, in other forms, but never in the form of dishonesty. *Lais*, who lures everybody, might have lured him; *Bacchus*, in the shape of Johnny Armstrong, had certainly often beguiled him; *Mercury*, the god of thieves and speculators, never. And now, as he marched along the road, with his hands in his pockets, the colour in his face came and went as an idea in his brain took form and coherency.

"If Cuolahan were to take the child . . ." He spoke the words to himself as he sat on a stile by the roadside, deep in thought. After remaining seated for several minutes, he rose with a look of resolution, wiped his forehead hurriedly with his handkerchief, and walked briskly by the field-path into Esbrough.

Across fields which had once been owned in fee by Armstrongs, ancestors of Johnny's, but which, generations back, had passed into the hands of a thriftier race. There had remained, however, to John the Last—they were all Johns—of the broad but somewhat barren acres around Esbrough, held by the Armstrongs in the times of the Tudors and Stuarts, two farms, one close to the town, large and good; the other, three or four miles away, small and bad. The land on this farm—Holcotes, it was called—would feed geese indifferently, and starve a few head of inferior cattle. Oats in favourable seasons came to something, barley struggled for existence, and wheat declined to grow at all. On the property were a huge barn and three labourers' cottages, dilapidated, curious for their antiquity—one had a stone built into the front, bearing the date 1585—and adapted to the domestic requirements of pigs of homely tastes. There was no homestead, and two or three rotting wooden structures did duty for farm buildings. An old grand-uncle of Johnny's left the two farms to him, with the stock on both, and the furniture in the large substantial house on the good farm. Johnny Armstrong, one and twenty, came from Northumberland, whither his grandfather, an Esbrough Armstrong, had withdrawn to find other far-off Cousin Armstrongs, to enter into possession of his unexpected own. He brought his young and comely wife with him; and everybody thought him a lucky fellow. This grand-uncle had "gone over to the majority" in the very nick of time. Too soon, as the result showed. For Johnny was young, inexperienced, and a jolly fellow in company. Before six harvests had been garnered, the good farm was the property of Captain Perrymont, a local landowner. The sale was effected through the agency of Bayliss, and was his only transaction during

his short career as an estate agent. After mortgages were paid off, and debts, of which there were plenty, paid, there was not very much money left for Johnny. But a few hundreds remained. Johnny removed, "till he got a farm to suit him," to the house he died in; for he never got the farm to suit him, nor, as far as anybody knew, ever looked for it. There was money in the ancient metal cashbox in the old grand-uncle's bureau to dig at, and Johnny dug. Bayliss also took his shovel there. For he liked Johnny well enough "in company," and Johnny liked him well enough, to lend him certain portions of his small stock of cash, taking "a memorandum" in return for each successive loan. And Bayliss was the tenant of the ninety-three acres some odd perches at Holcotes, and carried on a small smith's and foundry business in the barn metamorphosed into a factory. And at length Johnny, being a gentleman with unoccupied time and capital, and Bayliss a too persuasive friend of a versatile turn as to matters generally, the two men became partners in the business of blacksmiths, makers and menders of the neighbouring farmers' ploughs and harrows, and smiths' work in general. One sensible stipulation Johnny made. He knew something about farming; knew warm land from cold; and he made a proviso that the farm should be no part of the partnership. But Bayliss should carry on the Holcotes geese and cows, and barley and oats, on his own sole account. And he took "a memorandum" about all this. Between friends this was enough, and Johnny hated the prospect of "lawing." Bayliss, too, had a clear head, and wrote a good hand. Under such principals it is not surprising that business was bad, or that the two or three men employed in the blacksmiths shop followed the example of the masters pretty often, and let Punch wait for his new set of shoes, and little Hodge call a good many times for the new ploughshare. So Johnny lived upon the capital that lay still, a starveling remnant, in the bureau, instead of upon the expected profits of "Bayliss & Co." This fund at last was exhausted. There remained, however, Holcotes, the rental value of which was



fifteen shillings an acre, which Bayliss declared was fourteen more than it was worth. Sixty-five pounds a year? But nobody about Esbrough would buy the land at any reasonable price. Johnny had tried to sell it with his other farm; and it was not to be supposed, Bayliss said, that "far-comers" would be found to drop down from the clouds as purchasers of this barren patch. Further, as Johnny reasoned with his wife, it would not be "the right thing," as Bayliss, a friend and partner, was the tenant, to sell Holcotes at all. That poor uncomplaining woman made a speech of unusual force and determination. "John," she said, throwing her arms round the ne'er-do-well whom she had taken, out of her great girlish love, for better or for worse—all for worse, poor girl!—"John, I wish we had never known Mr. Bayliss." "Bayliss is the best friend I've got—I know that," replied the fool. And wifely wisdom rejoined not.

But money must be had. It was tantalising to be a land-owner, and want the price of a glass of refreshing whisky of an evening at the Packhorse and Talbot. It was nearly as bad as this to be told by the butcher that "his terms were quarterly:" to you, that is; but yearly to the rest of his "propertied" clients.

The genius of Paul Bayliss cut the knot. He was, as he confided to his partner, "up a damned tree" himself. He whispered in Johnny's ear the insidious, fatal word, Mortgage. Expatiated on the difficulty of getting the thing done in Esbrough; shortness of money; greedy nature of the natives; and then earned Johnny's eternal gratitude—and a share of the sovereigns—by telling him his sister could and would lend on the title-deeds of Holcotes at five per cent.

Barbara Bayliss, strict Methodist as she was, confessed to "unworldly" friends, over tea and the "thin" bread-and-butter served only at such love-feasts, that she "liked a snug mortgage." She had not, being a lady as well as a Methodist, frequented public-house parlours, or been in any respect that rolling stone that gathers no moss. Consequently she had every penny of her moiety of the little fortune she and

her brother had divided between them, and considerable increment thereon.

To his partner's proposal Johnny, seeing a comfortable vista of legs of mutton, with "glasses," harmonious evenings, and hilarity, in place of the stinted Saturday night's allowance and a meagre Sunday's dinner, cried content to Bayliss's proposal with all his heart. At the same time, he even devoted himself to serious business to the extent of forming some vague resolutions on the score of some day paying off the debt, principal and interest. As it was, the title-deeds of Holcotes passed into Miss Barbara Bayliss's possession, and she handed over to her brother the sum of two hundred pounds in the form of forty dirtyish five-pound notes of the Ravendale Banking Company.

Between friends a mortgage deed was looked upon as a useless piece of extravagance.

Johnny declared in his most social way, as he signed his name with a flourish, that he "hated lawyers and lawing;" and on his way home bought his poor little wife a black silk gown to mark a red-letter day in his calendar.

Miss Barbara Bayliss was perfectly satisfied; she had the solid and tangible security of the deeds, good old parchments, yellow and crumpled, with plenty of large seals upon them.

And for Johnny's security the amount of the loan was endorsed with the signatures of the parties on the back of the newest of the deeds, and duly witnessed by Paul Bayliss.

Months passed by, and the state of affairs warranted a further application for one hundred pounds. Over this loan the same process was gone through; and Johnny felt quite cheered by the business-like aspect of the transaction. Lastly, about twelve months before his death, there was a third loan of two hundred pounds, endorsed on the back of the deed. There was thus a debt of five hundred pounds on the Holcotes Farm, about a third of its value.

So that, at the time of his death, his income from his land was reduced to forty pounds a year by the payment of twelve pounds ten shillings of half-yearly interest to Miss Bayliss. Half a year's rent Bayliss was to have paid him on the day

of his death. And this twenty pounds he now saw a prospect of keeping in his own pocket, together with many future half-years' rent. For Johnny was a "far-comer" himself; his grand-uncle's one son had died; the Armstrongs had all left Esbrough; and if he had any relatives, they were his wife's people in Northumberland, a long way off, who were not in the least likely to come south, and inquire into the possessions of a man who had destroyed his movables by his own act, and who, as all the world about Esbrough believed, had mortgaged his few acres of wretched land for more than they were worth.

And Myles Cuolahan was offering to take the heir. Where? Anywhere, out of the way. On the tramp; in the pack of a hawker, who might never come back; part of the "swag" he trotted from fair to fair, or from door to door. Babies often died, too, and if his father had lived, he never would have had a halfpenny. And everybody who knew anything—Bayliss reasoned—knew that he had over-persuaded his sister to advance money by way of mortgage on such bad property; and nobody knew the amount, for Barbara was close. And as mortgagee she had a right to fore-close, and nobody would bid against him if he bought in with her money. And a great many other things, more or less knavish, and therefore instigated by the devil; every one of them aimed at defrauding this little son of Vulcan of his interest in forty bits of yellow metal year by year.

The power of gold to tear up the roots of that old tree honesty, and leave no shoot nor sucker to show the spot where it stood, has been too often a theme for novelists and other moral philosophers for it to be necessary that I should explain how it came about that the mind of Paul Bayliss, brooding over his bankrupt smithy; his hard year with the cattle and poultry; the cow that died of foot-and-mouth disease, and the rascally butcher who thought her carcass "too far gone for sendin' to London;" the cart-horse that was struck by lightning a couple of years ago, and that he had never been able to replace; chickens with pip; goslings trampled out of life by the pigs; the failure of the barley crop; all the evils



that could befall a football of fortune in the agricultural line—decided to let matters slide at all events; and as one thing leads to another, he presently determined to give them a kick on the way he wanted them to slide.

"We shall see, Barbara," he said to his sister, "what the estate will fetch towards your mortgage when we sell it up. Meantime you've got your interest safe."

Barbara Bayliss, content with her twenty-five pounds a year, asked no questions about the farm.

Her brother resolved also, now that Johnny was dead, to say good-bye to Packhorse and Talbot habits; for Paul Bayliss was no reckless profligate. He knew that the day comes to all alike, when atonement by hard labour or by suffering must come for ill-gotten pleasures and young follies. So he began well by expressing himself with much propriety of language about the calamity; grieved over Johnny's career and its untimely ending; put it about that there would not be a shilling left when the mortgage was cleared off, if the estate, indeed, would ever pay it; and after the inquest, behaved handsomely in the matter of the funeral, heading the subscription list got up very readily among Johnny's friends.

After the dead, the living.

The inquest over, he sought Myles Cuolahan, and asked him what he proposed to do about the child.

"Let Biddy keep him," said the hawker. "She's grown to the boy, and you wouldn't break her heart by taking him away."

"It seems a good arrangement," replied Bayliss. "To be sure, Armstrong has no relations here; and everybody knows the child is with her . . . and . . . and . . . But, Cuolahan, you are not likely to stay in this town?"

"No, we have been in Esbrough too long; my legs ache to be out in the open; so do Biddy's. We shall go on the tramp again. But niver you fear; the boy will be well looked after, and it's a healthy life."

Bayliss did not fear for the boy; he only feared for the voice of popular opinion. As it happened, popular opinion was silent on the subject. It was known that Johnny Arm-

strong's infant was put out to nurse, and thus the child was forgotten.

"A healthy life!" he murmured. "Yes!" with a secret shudder at the impious hope lying in his mind that perhaps the boy might die. "You will let me know from time to time that he is flourishing?"

"I will," said Myles.

"And if he wants help at any time, if I can give it, I will give it," he went on, trying to compound with present wickedness by imaginary and future benevolence. "Myles Cuolahan, it's good of you to take the boy. It reminds me of my own conduct at the funeral." He alluded, in these delicate terms, to his subscription. "The town will speak well of both of us." Myles grinned. He cared little for the opinion of the town, and thought little of Paul Bayliss's generosity. Then Paul, with a wry face, lugged out—the term is the only one possible for the leathern instrument then in use—his long purse, and fished up two sovereigns. They were a part of the twenty pounds due to his late partner.

"That is for the child, Myles. God knows, I am poor enough, and how to get through this year I do not know. But there it is. They shall never say that I deserted my poor partner's child after his death."

"Poor Johnny Armstrong!" said Myles. "Biddy shall have this money."

"Ay, poor Johnny!" said the other.

A week after this, Myles gave the signal for departure.

He carried the "swag" on his back—a box full of needles, pins, and cotton twist. Biddy carried the baby.

There was a rising ground a mile out of the town, where Myles called a halt.

"Turn him round, Biddy," he said. "Let him look at the place where his mother died. Look ye, poor little creetur! There's where all the Armstrongs lie buried. Ye come of as good a stock as meself, Myles Cuolahan—nearly. And it'll be about as much good for you. Look at the ould place, for Lord knows when ye'll see it again. Say God bless you, Biddy alaunah!"

As he turned on his way, a tear rolled down the cheek of the Irishman; but as he was walking in front of his wife, after the manner of the patriarch Jacob, Mohammed the Prophet, and the modern race of tramps, Biddy did not see it. But she heard him sigh under his breath, and she clutched the baby the tighter out of sympathy. "Poor Johnny Armstrong!"

## CHAPTER I.

IT is nine years later. The memory of poor Johnny Armstrong and his tragical end has well-nigh become a tradition. The lusty revellers whose voices joined in his choruses have gone the way that all lusty revellers go as the fatal fortieth year draws nigh; that is, they have either settled down into quiet folk who keep their eyes well open to the main chance, have married wives, and go to church regularly, or they have gone under altogether, and are no more seen. Some among them lie in the churchyard, their merriment stilled for ever. Some, ruined and beggared, have crept sadly up to London—the common refuge—where they perform the lowest duties in a city clerk's office, or prowl mournfully, with sad and wistful eyes, about the streets. Go ask, among those who have become respectable, what has become of their former friends. Charley is married and settled—that is good for Charley. Jack? When last you heard about Jack he was selling medicines on commission—that is bad for Jack. Tom is a billiard-marker. Harry is at Portland for his country's good. The fast set of a country town is like the fast set at a West End club: those only emerge safely who are wise enough to come out in good time; and the plungers in gin-and-water, pipes, and harmonious evenings, meet with much the same fate as the plungers in baccarat, badminton, loo, and opera-dancers. Which is, of course, just what it should be; for there ought not to be one fate for the rich and well-born, and another for those who never had a grandfather, and to whom the Funds are the shadow of a name.

Paul Bayliss is at Holcotes, going on quietly, but more



prosperously. Barbara, his sister, is buried, and he has inherited her little fortune. He is comfortably putting a small sum of money away every year out of the proceeds of the horse-shoes, pigs, poultry, and crops, at which he was disposed to swear when we first met him. There is a house on the Holcotes land now. Bayliss lives there; but he pays no rent. In uneasy moments a thought flashes across him that the time may come when he will have to pay up in full. To meet this evil, he puts the rent religiously into the bank every half-year, for he defrauds no one. Where is John Armstrong's heir? No one knows, and it is not his duty to run after him. Nor is it his duty to tell all the world to whom Holcotes belongs. There is no one living, since Barbara breathed her last, to ask him questions; no one who dares challenge his right to the land where, for nine long years, he has rested undisturbed. Discovery! What is there to discover? The rent is lying in the bank, ready for the owner to claim *when the owner is able to claim it*. But where is the owner? Nine years ago there was a baby: he is doubtless dead. Carried about the roads by a drunken Irish hawker and his wife; badly fed, perhaps; neglected, most probably. Why, the children of the poor, as Bayliss has read, die at the rate of fifty per cent. before they are five years old. Things have thriven with him, too, which all country people take for a clear sign that Providence is on his side. He has given up his bad habits, is temperate, works hard, is a churchwarden; and though his farm is small, he turns it to the best advantage, and stands well among his neighbours; insomuch that, when he marries, everybody says that his wife is a lucky woman; and the girls envy Mrs. Bayliss, who has a husband so prosperous, so cheery, and so good-natured. To be sure, the baby may be living. Well, and if he is, let him turn up and claim his own. Then Paul Bayliss pictures himself, after disputing the identity of the boy as long as possible, enacting the part of the virtuous guardian. "Young man," he will say, "the farm is yours; but I am your tenant. There is your rent, safely and regularly paid into the bank year after year, to a separate account in my own name, but never

touched. Take it, and let your father's oldest friend still remain your friend and tenant." True it is, that there are moments when another drama is acted unwillingly before his eyes, when he perforce sees himself in quite another character, when he welcomes young Armstrong as an intruder, denies his right even to the name he bears, and says nothing about the ownership of the farm. Strangely enough, these thoughts generally crowd across his brain at church-time, during the morning sermon; and at such an hour he envies his neighbours, the fat, jolly farmers, who can sit with their heads back and their eyes upturned in a sublime rapture of indifference, while the clergyman harangues sinners—that is, the farm-labourers—on their sins, and exhorts the profligates, the worldly-minded, the proud, the uplifted, the licentious, the thoughtless, and the sensual—always the farm-labourers—to turn from their evil ways.

The baby living? Could such a baby die? Come with me to Long Lane, to one of the most wretched streets in the most wretched part of Sheffield, and see for yourself.

In a poor and dirty room, whose wainscoted walls were, perhaps, once white; whose ceiling could never, surely, have been white; whose furniture consists of a bed—a straw mattress spread in a corner—a table and one chair, are two children, sitting side by side and hand in hand upon the mattress. It is seven o'clock and a bright May evening; the democratic sun, who is not particular, and warms everything with a fine impartiality, shines through the dirty panes of glass upon the pair. One is a boy—look at him—the image, the perfect resemblance, of poor Johnny Armstrong, with the same dark-brown curly hair; the same bright eyes, fearless and keen—hazel eyes, deep and true; the same broad forehead, and—but here the likeness ceases. For his lips are firm and strong, while his unlucky father's were weak and shifty; his chin is full and square, while Johnny's was small and retreating; and in these two signs of a merciful fortune those who knew his mother might have traced a resemblance to her. For this is no other than Jack Armstrong himself, the little son of Vulcan, born in a foundry while the

seething metal ran up and down the moulds, and the furnace flashed its red light upon his opening eyes, carried up and down the roads of England for the fresh breezes of heaven to strengthen his frame, and the pure country food—the milk and bread ungrudgingly bought for him by poor Biddy Cuolahan—to make him wax strong and lusty. A big boy, mark you, for his years; brave and determined: about him none of the London street-boy's craft and impudence, for he knows them not. Myles Cuolahan, like all the rest, has been to London, but the boy has not run wild with others: he has had grave duties to perform; and when they are in a town, as now, while Myles goes out with his pins, needles, and twist to earn the daily bread, little Jack must stop at home and look after Norah, or must lead her up and down into the fields to play, pick the daisies where he can, and breathe such fresh air as may be found within hail of the Sheffield streets. Norah is poor Biddy's parting bequest to Jack. When, four years ago, she lay down and died, stricken with some mortal disease of over-fatigue and trouble, she made Jack take a great oath.

"Swear to me now," she said; "swear, Jack, asthore—you that I carried in my arms and nursed at my own breast, Jack, my own son, almost—swear now, so help you Mary and the blessed saints, that you'll always look to the girl. I'm going, Jack, but I'll die aisy if you'll promise for little Norah."

Jack was eight at the time, and Norah three, but the boy was perfectly acquainted with the nature and responsibilities of the trust, though he had not, as yet, even a nodding acquaintance with the blessed saints. But he repeated after her, crying the while, "So help me Mary and the blessed saints, Biddy, I'll never leave little Norah! Why would I?"

Indeed, he held the child in his little arms as he spoke, and her cheek was nestled against his.

"'Tis no use spakin' to Myles; no use at all, at all. O Jack! and he so good when the dhrink isn't upon him. And promise me something for yourself, Jack, darlin', and then I'll die happy as well as aisy; becace I know then that



you'll be always good to my little Norah. Promise me that you'll never, never drink."

Jack promised readily enough, having, at that early age, little experience of the temptations of whisky, beer, or rum, and, as yet, no discrimination of vintages.

"I'll never drink, Biddy. And, see, perhaps some day Myles 'll leave it off."

"Lave it off!" she repeated, with a bitter sneer. "Lave it off, is it? He'll never lave it off so long as he's got a copper to spend at the house. Lave it off! Did ye iver know man or woman that left it off when once they'd begun? Lave it off! 'Tis meat and clothing: 'tis hope: 'tis love: 'tis their wives, God help us: 'tis their children: 'tis their salvation: 'tis their praste: 'tis their mass, I tell ye. Lave it off! Myles is dhrinkin' now, when his Biddy lies a-dyin'. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

She stopped, growing weaker every moment, and wept silent tears of resignation and sorrow. Presently the last tear rolled down her thin and sunburnt cheek, and her features lay in the trustful smile of death.

The Lacedæmonians, in their laudable anxiety to hold up to their much-suffering youth the dangers of wine in their proper light, were energetic, but elementary. They got certain Helots, who were, no doubt, delighted at getting the office, and made them gloriously drunk at stated times; then the Spartan youth admired the wondrous magic of wine, in that it turns an intelligent creature, usually firm on his legs and sharp with his tongue, into a shambling, in-kneed, slobbering animal, incapable of walking, confused of speech, and muddy of intellect. The lesson was, perhaps, well enough in a country where there was no whisky, and where they actually mixed their finest wine with turpentine, so as to make it more nauseous than the black broth, and a less-to-be-desired drink than the sparkling Eurotas, but it would not do in an advanced civilisation. Could we contrive such a lesson, it might be managed, with a little more cruelty, by first inspiring one Helot—for one would be enough—with a steady unconquerable love of whisky, and by then inviting

the attention of the callow brood to the sufferings of his wife and children. For they would see how, while the disease grew stronger and stronger, the wife would go about, her face set fair to meet the world, but with a heart ever more bitter and miserable; how the children would grow shabbier in spite of her constant efforts; how the table would become daily more meagre; how the furniture would disappear bit by bit; and how, lastly, there would be nothing left to stave off starvation for another day.

Little Jack knew nothing of his father's sins; but all these things he had seen and noticed, in his brief life of nine years, in his benefactor, Myles Cuolahan, as he went faster and faster down that fatal path whose flowers seem at first so bright, whose briars, so strong and cruel, as you hurry down the slope, rend your garments as well as your heart.

Biddy died. Myles came home too far gone to know it.

Next day, with the passionate self-reproof that his better nature taught him, he wept and prayed over his wife's cold body, and after the funeral, kept sober for a fortnight.

Then it began all over again.

The children had been out in the afternoon, Jack leading Norah. Then they came home and waited for Myles. For breakfast they had bread-and-milk; for dinner they had bread without the milk; for tea, because the bread was all gone, and Myles not come home, they had nothing.

Jack told all his stories, one after the other; then he danced to the child; then he tossed her in his strong arms; then he sat down beside her, and caressed her. The fretful hunger was too strong at last to bear, and she burst into a low wail of pain.

"Hush, Norah, darlin', hush! Father 'll come presently."

"Jack, I am so hungry."

"Not yet," said the sage of nine. "You know you must never be hungry till father comes home. Norah shall have her tea directly."

Not, you see, that the children kept fashionable hours, and had tea late, in this rookery; only Myles had left no money, and they had to wait.

A thought struck the boy. He put Norah off his knees, and searched in the cupboard. There was a single crust of bread—dry, it is true, but still a piece of bread—lying in the corner of the cupboard unnoticed. This he put into a cup and poured a little water over it so as to soften it, and then he fed the child, who gnawed it as ravenously as a dog gnaws a bone.

"There, Norah," he whispered, "we shall have more presently, when father comes home. I didn't know it was there. Eat it all up, Norah."

She devoured it by degrees, taking her time over the simple meal, while poor Jack looked at her with ravenous eyes and envied. Presently, she laid her head upon his shoulder and went fast asleep. Jack took the blanket from the bed, laid it over her, with his arm for pillow, took off her shoes and socks, and lay down beside her. She was quieted; that, at least, was something: but where was Myles? For the first time in his life, little Jack felt the horrible stings of suspicion: he thought that Myles had deserted them both. He was too hungry to sleep, and lay silently beside the little girl, staring at the red light of sunset in the little bit of sky above him.

He began to think of going downstairs to beg a piece of bread, but he was too proud for that yet. So the sunset faded and the darkness came on, and there was no Myles, and Jack lay broad awake while the church clock struck nine, and ten, and eleven.

Then the pain grew so great as to be intolerable, and he was fain to moan for hunger in his childish misery.

Twelve o'clock struck, and the street grew quieter; and one o'clock, and the street was almost hushed, but no Myles came, and the boy's heart sank lower and lower. Then Norah awoke and called him. He crept back to the mattress, and so fell asleep with the girl in his arms. The moon shone in and lit up the room: presently the light, shifting round, fell full upon the sleeping figures, the sweet round faces of childhood, the little limbs tossed carelessly, and the curly locks lying together; and with it all, a sense of the girl's confidence



in her protector, the boy's courage for the helpless child, shown in the attitude of their hands. In such a light, on such a scene, we might fancy the room tenanted by the guardian angels of the children. Are there, or is it fancy, the bending figures of two women praying hand in hand above the bed? Are those white streaks upon the wall only the ignoble stains of poverty and neglect? or are they the white robes of the two dead mothers, jealous for their children?

## CHAPTER II.

MYLES CUOLAHAN, oblivious of the children, was at his club, a select circle of Irish gentlemen who used to meet nightly, or on such nights as were convenient, for the club was one of Perpetual Adoration of Bacchus, at that famous tavern, the Fox and Hounds. This was a night of more than common interest, for it was Monday, and there were gathered together, quite by accident, a collection of celebrities of whom Ireland had indeed reason to be proud. There was Paddy Flinn, hero of a hundred fights, whose life and exploits are recorded in the chronicles of the P.R.; Anthony Noon, than whom none better wielded a bunch of fives; and Alick Reed, a heavy-weight who feared not even to withstand the godlike twins, first patrons of the art of boxing. There was O'Carrol, who could prove lineal descent from the Irish kings of the same name, and now deemed it no dishonour to advance civilisation as a hodman. There was Tape the "translator," of whom it is related that, being once entrusted with a pair of boots to translate—that is, to fit with new soles and heels—he disposed of the raw material for what it would fetch as leather in the rough, and drank the proceeds, afterwards humorously translating the boots by means of the binding of an old leather-bound volume which happened to be lying handy. He was the same man who, one Sunday morning, was left in charge of as noble a piece of beef as was ever dropped into a pot to boil, while his mates went out to drink. The temptation of thirst came upon him:

I grieve to say that Mr. Tape yielded to the whisperings of the devil, took out the beef, replacing it by a lapstone, and sold it for what it would fetch in old ale. When the two mates came back in time to boil the cabbage, they naturally took the joke in ill part, and the honest translator kept out of their way till at least one more Sunday had passed. A fellow of an infinite wit was Tape, and a clubable man, able to sing and dance as well as drink. Then there was Anthony Noon again, above mentioned, who had retired from the ring, and now found his means of subsistence in an occupation which began about the 1st of September and ended somewhere about February. For he was accustomed to purchase, at low rates, the leanest, skinniest birds that came up to market, and could thus act by them in the same unprincipled manner as the American, perhaps an imitator of Mr. Noon, adopted for the jumping frog: he filled them with small shot and sold them by weight. It was a lucrative business, but it left his summers a mere blank, and during a good six months in the year honest Anthony lived chiefly in seclusion. Patsy M'Nulty was there, as good-natured a bruiser as ever stripped; he had just lost his fight with Nailer, owing to a too confident belief in Myles Cuolahan's training powers. And there, too, was Denys O'Toole, grown old now and grey-headed, but respected still, by reason of the handsome thrashing he had once given the Prince of Wales, when that potentate, accompanied by two friends, neither of them members of the Temperance League, or even of the Christian Young Men's Association, ventured one night into the Rookery at Westminster, and assisted at an Irish wake. And it was reckoned part of the general meanness of the English character that when the Prince came to the throne he did not seek out Denys and reward him with a pension for life. Yet Denys was the only man in all his life who ever showed the Prince what a thing it is to have your head in Chancery.

The room was a long, low room at the back of the tavern; on the table at the end sat a fiddler, at his feet a hat into which every new-comer dropped a sixpence, a collection for Brien M'Taverty, now in trouble, and about to be tried the

next day on a trumped-up charge of assaulting the police while intoxicated. Every man had his pipe in his mouth, and some of the ladies too—this was a club in which ladies' society, so far from being avoided, was even courted—and everybody, man or woman, had his mug of drink handy to his fingers. Among them was Myles Cuolahan, the little spare man with the big hands, singing, drinking, and roaring with the best. If you look in his face, you will notice a queer expression, one of anxiety, a sort of fear upon it. His cheeks are puffed, his nose is red, he looks twenty years older than when we met him last. Poor Myles has been going downhill fast since his wife died, and is now very near the end of his tether, though there is still time to turn back.

There is dancing; there is singing; there is the music, not low and rippling, but loud and harsh, of women's voices; there is fiddling; there is stamping on the floor; and presently there are indications of a coming duel.

"Fight it out, lads!" cries Myles, springing to the floor. "More's the fun. Pity 'twould be if the dhrink don't make an alteration. We come in sad, and we go out happy; we come in peaceful, and we go out quarrelsome: Glory be to whisky!"

Whether the club danced, or sang, or drank, or fought, the fiddle went on exactly the same, playing Irish jigs. The fiddler sat with his nose in the air and his eyes on the ceiling, as if absorbed in thought. Now and then he moved his right foot in time, but besides this he gave no sign of life beyond the movement of his arms and fingers.

The row began, if one may trace things back to their ultimate cause, like all rows since the siege of Troy, through a woman. There was a neat and extremely pretty little Welshwoman, remarkable among the other ladies present for the careful purity of her attire. She had black hair, very bright eyes, and a very striking expression in her face, which, when she was watching a fight, made you understand how the Roman ladies managed to enjoy a gladiatorial contest. She was the lawful wife and better half of Patsy M'Nulty. She spoke with a pure and beautiful accent in



"book" English, perfectly different from that of the rough Irish round her, and as if—which was in fact the case—she was speaking a foreign language. And though she sometimes used the "argot" of her associates, she preferred the tongue of Addison, which she had been taught at school.

"My husband," she remarked to Mr. Nailer, already mentioned above, who showed signs of grogginess about the head, "would scorn to be intoxicated by six little glasses of whisky. My husband is a ferry much petter man than you or Myles Cuolahan either, though you did beat him and win the money at the match. But everybody knows that was because Myles trained him, and they both got drunk together every day. He would be perfectly prepared to fight you again to-morrow. Do not think my husband is afraid of you."

After firing this blow in a calm and collected manner, she retired to the other end of the room, nearest the door, where she sat and smilingly watched the effect. Mr. Nailer, whose sensibilities were as keen as his proportions were large, was stung to the quick by this observation, and instantly leaping to his feet, began a circuit round the room, pushing his way through the dancers with the carelessness of superior strength. Encumbered as he was with many glasses of whisky, which made his head roll about and his legs lurch, his progress was unsteady.

"Where's M'Nulty?" he shouted. "Show me M'Nulty. Bring out your Patsy M'Nulty; him as I thrashed already, and him as I'm ready to thrash again for five pounds or a hundred. Come out! Myles Cuolahan—Myles the trainer—Ho! ho!—Myles with the big fist, come out both of ye, till I kill ye at wunst."

Patsy and Myles, who were side by side, rushed to the front, and in a moment the bridge of battle was Homerically set with combatants, in which all, save the modest little Welshwoman, who only looked on and smiled, took an active and a pleasurable part.

After it had raged for ten minutes or so, the landlord, thinking that enough blood was shed for the preservation of honour, turned out the lights, and when quiet was restored,

threatened to turn out the combatants as well, unless they consented to take their drink "quiet and sober, like Christians." They shook hands and sat down again. The lights were lit once more, the fiddler, who had been stopped, struck up another jig, and all was harmony again.

"You're getting dhrunk, Myles," said Patsy, as a friendly observation. "Ye were dhrunk last night; and ye were dhrunk the night afore last night. How long have you been in it now?"

"Six weeks to-night, Patsy. I've been dhrunk for six weeks every night; and spent all the money. Lord help the childher!"

"Then don't do it again," rejoined the bruiser. "Go home now, Myles, and go to bed."

"I had 'em last night, Pat. I had the horrors worse than iver they come before. I got out of bed and I tuk the razor—think o' that, now—and I stood over the childher on their matthrass and . . . and . . . I don't know how it was I got safe to bed again, and they woke up safe this morning. I'm afraid to go home, Pat, I'm afraid."

He finished his glass of whisky, which was not adulterated and spoiled with water, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Then he looked furtively round the room, and behind him, as if there might be some fearful thing prowling in the rear, and tried to laugh.

But the little Welshwoman with the demure countenance, seeing no further prospect of any fighting, came and carried away his friend.

"Patsy, you are coming home with me. You have to begin training to-morrow, and your fight is to take place in a fortnight. It is only for a ten-pound note, but you must win it. You have had two more glasses of whisky than by a right you should have taken. Come home at once."

Patsy was like a lamb, and followed his commanding officer. He was not a bit the worse for the little skirmish he had just gone through; a cut lip heals very soon, and a black eye is one of those things that few gentlemen of his habits of thought and occupation are long without.

Myles, left alone, began to drink harder. In course of time he found himself pleasantly and hopelessly drunk, and rejoiced, for he could now bid defiance—a drunken man's defiance—to the dreams that haunted him night after night, when the fumes of the whisky left his brain. It was past one in the morning when he stumbled up the stairs, threw himself upon the bed, dressed as he was, and in a moment was fast asleep.

It might have been an hour later—not more, because there was yet no light in the sky, and the moon shone bright and clear through the window—that he stirred on the bed, put out an arm as if to feel for something, and then, with a start and a groan, sat up and looked wildly round him. There was nothing in the room, not even furniture; there was nobody save the sleeping children in the corner; but he glared round and round the room as if following some shape or spectral image of his brain. Presently his eyes dilated and became fixed. The creature of his drunken fancy resolved itself into something resembling a form; took to itself arms and legs; assumed eyes that looked into Myles's face, and fingers that beckoned him on; put on a face which was one of unimaginable cunning, devilry, and mockery; and, stooping close to his bedside, moved cadaverous lips through which no sound came, but which spoke words easy to be understood. "Come, Myles, now is the time to do it."

Yet there was nobody in the room at all, except himself and the two children; these were sleeping on their mattress in the corner; the moon lay full upon them, showing little Norah with her head nestled on Jack's shoulders, her arms about his neck, her long dark hair lying in masses over Jack's head and face; and the boy, weary with hunger and watching, lying on his back and sleeping off the pain. The eyes of the drunkard, fixed upon the Person who walked slowly from the bedside, passed over the space from the bed to the cupboard, from the cupboard, still more slowly, to the mattress where the children lay asleep.

Then Myles groaned aloud, and, slipping from the bedside, stood upright, steady as a rock, though he had been



almost helplessly drunk but an hour before, and sighed heavily.

Then he sat down again on the bed, deliberately took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, unlaced and took off his boots, which were the heavy double-soled boots worn by trampers and bought by those gentlemen of Lancashire who correct their wives with booted feet. Then, in his stockings, he crept silently to the cupboard.

What is it his hands feel for in the dark as he tries each shelf, one after the other, in vain? He forgets, perhaps, how only that very morning he took his razor to a neighbour, under the pretence of wanting an edge put on it, and left it with him for safety. Unable to find it, he turns round, still following his invisible director. Then his eye brightens, and he creeps across the room to the fireplace. The poker lies there. As he steps a plank creaks beneath his feet, and little Jack wakes up.

With a start, like Myles, and with a dreadful fear upon him, for he sees Myles out of bed, dressed, and stealthily creeping towards the mattress, with the poker in his hand. He is moving so slowly, so slowly, that at first you would think him standing in the middle of the room. But he does move, for all that, and it is always in the direction of the bed; while in his hand he carries, lifted in readiness to strike, the poker, which flashes as he gets within the moonlight from the window. Jack, like some poor Indian bird in presence of the snake, sat spell-bound, motionless, his eyes fixed on the white face and menacing features of Myles.

The room was light enough, in the twilight of the summer and the bright morn of May, for him to see something more—something that he had never yet seen in his drunken benefactor—a purpose. His mouth was drawn back, his dry lips trembled with impatience, his white teeth gleamed, his eyeballs starting from his head, his body was bent double, as he stole, slowly, slowly, over the boards with the weapon in his hand. And then Jack saw, that further, though Myles was looking him straight in the face, he did not see him—he was looking at some one else.

For between Myles and the children stood the devilish spectre of his brain ready to make poor Myles a murderer! But as yet he had not given the signal.

Jack never knew how long this lasted—probably but half a minute—for his nerves were frozen with terror. Then little Norah moved in her sleep, and whispered in her dreams; and Jack, recovering from his stupefaction, sprang out of the bed and stood face to face with Myles. Stripling and child as he was, the boy was ready to do battle with the drunkard for the life of Norah. On the bare arms of the man the muscles stood out like the ropes of the rigging of a yacht; in his face there was set a look of dreadful resolution; his eyes gleamed with the purpose of destruction: he was possessed with a devil. To meet all this force there was nothing but a child of nine, weak with long hunger, too, if that made any difference, and only strong of will. On his forehead fell the hot and poisonous breath of the drunken man, like that gas which, descending upon the earth, poisons and chokes the life out of man and plant. Almost within reach of the heavy iron weapon, the child stood gazing into the face of the haunted man, who dragged forward his feet, inch by inch, as if drawn by something beyond his will. And the boy saw, while he shivered and trembled to see it, that Myles had no perception at all of his presence; their faces were not a foot apart, for Myles was stooping; their eyes looked into and were reflected in each other: but Myles saw nothing. And Jack would have screamed and cried for help, but he was afraid; for he did not know what to do or what would happen.

The man made a hasty step forward—one more, and he would be upon the boy. Jack stepped aside and seized him by the right arm, turning him suddenly and violently away from the mattress where little Norah lay sleeping, with her white bare limbs tossed carelessly and gleaming in the moonlight. To Jack's astonishment, Myles made no sign, but continued slowly advancing in the new direction. This was that of his own bed, which lay but a yard off. Jack—always with one eye upon the villanous poker—pulled him gently

by the shirt-sleeve till he nearly touched the bed, and then fell back and watched. As his knee struck the iron edge of the bed, Myles gave a fierce but muffled cry and raised the poker to strike. Once—twice—thrice; and then he redoubled the blows upon the unoffending pillow, while the great drops rolled off his forehead and his chest heaved at the exercise. Then, suddenly, dropping the poker, he fell down upon his knees by the bedside, and burst into violent prayers and sobs.

When he was fairly spent and the danger was over, the day was breaking. Jack quietly took the poker and hid it beneath his own mattress. Little Norah still slept undisturbed. Then mindful of poor Biddy's last injunction, he fell upon his knees and thanked God as one who has escaped a great and terrible peril. And then he turned to watch Myles. His face buried in his hands—his whole frame shaken and trembling with emotion, he was crying, praying, and cursing, all in the same breath.

"O Lord!" he groaned, "forgive me! I have killed them both! My little Norah—Norah, alaunah, my darlin! my love! my little baby! my black-haired Norah, mavourneen! will ye niver spake to me again?—niver kiss your wicked father's cheeks?—niver twine your little arms round his neck? Niver again—niver again! May the Lord curse the dhrink! O Jack! now it's your blood my arms are dabblin' in—your innocent blood, my purty boy, that I love as well as Norah, and better. O Lord! Lord! . . . forgive me! forgive me!"

"What's the use, Myles, of askin' to be forgiven? Why don't you get up, Myles Cuolahan, ye blackhearted murdherin' Prodesdan—why don't ye get up, and run away? They'll find ye, and they'll hang ye, and sarve ye right!"

"I can't get up. I'm tied to the bed. 'Tis the Lord that houlds me tight and won't let me go. Lord! Lord! let me go and be hanged, but show me once more—oh! show me once more the childher, if only to mock me, before I die. And I'll take the poker and beat out my own brains, and thin we shall



all three come to You at wunst. Norah and Jack will go to heaven, where Biddy sits playin' on a goulden harrup and waitin' for us; but I shall niver go there, and they'll be all there miserable for iver and for iver, cryin' out their blessed eyes when they ought to be singin' and makin' glory. O Jack! O Biddy! 'tis Myles has spoiled your heaven for ye. For the Lord can niver forgive this night—He can't do it. I musn't ax it. It wouldn't be fair on Patsy M'Nulty, who niver killed anybody, except by accident and in his divarshin. Lord! I dusn't ax it—I don't——” Then he began again almost in the same words.

When he prayed again to see the “childher” once more, Jack, who had no terror now that he had once successfully diverted him from the mattress, put his hand under his forehead and lifted it up, lying down so that his face met Myles's. Myles showed no surprise. He thought it was an answer to his prayer, and only kissed the boy silently and solemnly, his tears falling upon his face. Then he murmured, “Now, Norah, O Lord! Glory be to all the saints!”

Jack brought Norah, still asleep, and laid her in front of him. When the man saw the child, he burst into a fit of fresh sobs and lamentations, waking her up.

Little Norah began to prattle, but Jack took her up again, and laid her on the mattress.

“Norah must go to sleep again directly.”

“Iss,” said Norah, lying down and shutting her eyes very obediently. Directly Jack left her, however, she sat up and began to crow and toss her arms about. Myles got up from his knees, wringing his hands, and began debating aloud whether he should run away or not. Before he had settled that important point, the fit of repentance and despair seemed to leave him as suddenly as it came, and he lay down on the bed with his eyes shut, and fell fast asleep. Jack proceeded leisurely to undress him. This partially accomplished, he bethought him of the next day, and proceeded to examine his pockets. In the coat-tail there was a small loaf. In the pockets there was a penny. Not another farthing had the man, though his receipts the day before had amounted to some

eight or nine shillings. Poor Jack had eaten nothing for nearly twenty hours, and he could wait no longer. Dividing the loaf into two parts, he took one for himself and the other he kept for Norah, giving her a little piece at a time. His own was soon gone, and he was hungry still. But he would not touch the child's portion, and sat down again on the bed, wearied with watching and waiting; and presently the two children were sound asleep again in each other's arms; and when the morning roused them up all was but a dream of the night.

### CHAPTER III.

IT was not till one o'clock in the day that Myles Cuolahan awoke, first with the feeling of lazy contentment which always follows violent exertion and long sleep; then with a sense of discomfort, due to the whisky; and then with a sudden, agonising pang at the heart, when he remembered his dreadful deed of the night—a pang which made him leap from the bed and stare wildly round, crying, “Jack!—Norah!—the childher.”

He remembered it all: the devil who came to his bedside and whispered; who went to the cupboard and pointed to where the razor generally lay; who led him to the poker, and put it into his hand; who bid him creep softly, so as not to wake the little ones; who nerved his arm to strike, and then, when the deed was done, left him despairing. What he could not remember, trying to recall the time when he crept slowly round the room, with his arm half-raised, and his head bent forward, was the *reason*; why had the devil told him to kill the children? Yet he knew there was a reason, and a good one, because it seemed the only thing left to do, the one possible thing, before the whole was finished.

He was standing with his back to the children's mattress, and suddenly it flashed across him that behind him, silent, battered, bathed with blood, were the murdered children. Then a worse horror fell upon his heart, and it became colder than stone. The beads of such a sweat as stood upon Mac-

beth's brow in the morning, stood upon his brow ; his limbs shook beneath him ; he turned up his face, and met the sun's great eye staring in upon him like an accuser ; and then, not daring to turn round, he stepped to the window, threw it open, and leaned his head out, looking into the crowded street below. When the mind is laden with some great and terrible burden of anxiety or guilt, it takes an interest, by way of refuge, in any little trifle that meets it. Oliver Cromwell, when he signs the death-warrant of Charles, flirts the ink in his neighbour's face. "Brutal flippancy !" cry the foolish critics, not discerning here a proof of the man's terrible mental struggles. If you read the ghastly stories of great crimes, you will find everywhere, and in grim contrast against the terrible reality, the importance of the trifle. As when Beatrice Cenci is led to execution, her last words were not of terror, of repentance, of blind wrath against the cruelty of fate, but about the arrangement of her hair :—

"Here, mother, tie  
My girdle for me, and bind up this hair  
In any simple knot : ay, that does well.  
And yours, I see, is coming down."

So poor Myles Cuolahan, the murderer, leaned out of his window and watched the passers-by. There was a Punch and Judy, the drama just finishing with Toby the dog, the beadle, and—the gallows. He laughed at the beadle, but when it came to the gallows he felt a sort of uneasiness, just as if something had been said or done which jarred upon him. Then there was a lusty quarrel between two ladies just beneath him, touching a disputed debt of twopence. Before the policeman sauntered round the corner there was a little fight, in which mischief was done to the extent of many twopences, and both went off in custody together—in chains, so to speak, but preserving still grandeur of spirit and freedom of tongue. The sight of the man in blue gave Myles another feeling of distrust which annoyed him ; but that, too, passed away. And then he watched the children who swarmed in the crowded street, or marked their sports, which were many ; for some danced on the pavement to the



tune of a barrel-organ—girls these, who would, if they were lucky, eventually become ladies of the *corps de ballet*: some sailed bits of wood, purloined from the shop, down the flowing gutter: some hung about the stalls, and tried to steal the fruit: some addressed themselves gravely to the task of nursing their younger brothers and sisters. It was a warm afternoon, and all were out.

Myles began to get hungry, and once, under the first impulse, drew in his head and half turned round; then, with a hollow groan, leaned out again, and, for a few minutes, knew and saw nothing but his misery. He did not hear a step on the stairs and a knock at his door, which, no notice having been taken at first, was repeated, and then, there being still silence, the door was opened, and a lady came in.

She looked round the room, bare and desolate of everything except the bed and the mattress, and saw the man standing at the window. She called him. As he made no answer, she crossed the room, and pulled him by the sleeve.

"Myles Cuolahan"—her voice was low and deep, and sounded to him like that of an accusing spirit. "Myles Cuolahan, where are the children?"

Instead of turning round to speak to her, he moaned an inarticulate reply, and still keeping his face to the window, he backed to the bed and sat down, his head in his hands.

"Myles Cuolahan," she repeated, "where are the children?"

He only groaned, for it was with him as with David when Nathan turned upon him and said, "Thou art the man."

Where were the children? He only pointed with his hand to the corner where lay the mattress with its dreadful burden, and waited for the cry of horror which was to follow. But no cry of horror came.

"Is the man mad? Myles Cuolahan, you have been drinking again this morning; and it is only two o'clock."

He was too much shaken to say anything; but the words fell upon him as if they were a dream. You see, he was living still in delirium and the crime of the night.

There were steps of children and the prattle of voices on

the stairs. They might be, thought Myles, if that was possible, the voices of Jack and Norah. They even came into the room—the steps and the voices—and his brain went round, because he thought they were the accusing spirits of the slain. Was it an accusing spirit that laid two little hands upon his knees, and pulled aside his fingers from his face, crying, “Dada—dada?” He sprang to his feet, with a sudden gesture and a wild cry, then looked round.

“Miss Ferens! The childher!”

Then he pushed his visitor roughly to one side, and looked at the mattress. It was just as he had seen it the day before, covered with its single blanket—no mangled remains of murdered children, no blood and dreadful evidences of the crime, nothing at all; and staring him in the face were the laughing eyes of his little Norah, Jack with, for once, a hard, resentful look, and Miss Ferens, the district visitor. He caught the little girl in his arms, and kissed and hugged her, laughing and crying together, for it came upon his mind suddenly how the whole dreadful thing was a dream, and he had not killed the children after all.

“It’s a dhrame,” he said, keeping the child in his arms. “It’s a great, big, ugly dhrame.”

“It’s no dream, Myles,” said Jack solemnly.

Myles turned ashy pale.

“It’s no dream, Myles. Ma’am, he left us all yesterday without a bit of bread, and not a penny to get any with. He went out at nine, and we had no breakfast. Then Norah began to cry, and then I went and begged a slice of bread from downstairs. And he never came home, and we had no dinner, and I was ashamed to beg any more. And it got dark, and he never came back; and I found a crust in the cupboard, and Norah had it in water; and then we went to sleep. In the night I woke up, and Myles was over us with the poker in his hand. . . . See, ma’am, here’s the poker”—he drew it out from the mattress. “Standing over us, so, with hand up to kill us.”

“It’s all true for you, Jack,” groaned Myles; “it’s all true.”

“He didn’t see me when I woke and got up; and I pulled

him away by the arm, and then—you was mad drunk, Myles, or else you wouldn't have done it, you know—he banged and beat his pillow, and then he knelt down and cried because he said he'd killed the children."

Miss Ferens snatched the child from his arms.

"Myles Cuolahan, you are worse than Cain!"

"I am," he groaned humbly, "I am; and Abel was a born angel alongside o' me, the blaygaird!"

His meaning was doubtless good, though his knowledge of Scripture was confused.

"And I looked in your pocket, Myles, and there was a twopenny loaf and a penny."

"I've been dhrunk," Myles murmured, looking up and addressing nobody in particular, "every night for six weeks. And this is the end of it."

"At all events," said Miss Ferens, "it's the end of one thing. You shall not have the children here any longer."

"What will I do then?" he asked.

"You have had delirium tremens. If you drink any more, it will kill you."

"And a good thing to."

"Perhaps not," she replied grimly. "Now, Myles Cuolahan, you are dangerous. How do I know that you may not have a fit now, and kill us all? I shall take this little girl home with me for to-night. The boy I will take somewhere else. You shall be left alone till you can take care of yourself. Jack, where are Norah's things?"

"She's got 'em all on," said Jack. "So have I."

"I've sold 'em all," said the drunkard, "for whisky. I've sold all my own things, too, and all my sticks. There's nothing left to sell now. Even the bed and the matthrass is lent to me by the landlord."

"If I leave you alone," said Miss Ferens, "you will go out and get drunk again."

Myles turned out both his pockets with a significant gesture which silenced the lady.

"Now, Myles, I'll do this for you, and you shall have one more chance—I will take care of the children for a day or



two myself. If you do not mend your ways you shall never see either of them again. Do you hear? You shall never see them again—not Jack, not little Norah; and you shall be left alone without a friend to help you while you drink and drink yourself lower and lower, till the devil clutches you by the throat and bids you kill yourself. And your child shall never know even the name of her drunken, worthless father.”

She took Norah in her arms, and Jack by the hand, and turned to the door. Jack left her, and ran back to Myles.

“Never mind, Myles. Don’t cry. You didn’t mean to kill us, you know. It was only the drink.”

“O Jack! Jack, darlint!” Myles groaned, spreading out his hands in distress.

“Come, Jack,” said Miss Ferens. “If Myles reforms he shall have you back again;” and disappeared shutting the door behind her.

For a while Myles sat brooding, motionless. Then he stood up, and mechanically put on his boots and his hat; and then a curious change suddenly fell upon his face—a look of desire, of cunning, of devilry, while the saddened air of repentance vanished. For Myles was hungry, and the demon of drink had seized him again. He stole down the stairs and into the street, and stealthily made for the Fox and Hounds. Looking up and down the street to make sure that Miss Ferens was not watching him, he stole into the place, and carelessly nodded to the landlord.

“Bring Misther Cuolahan’s score,” said that great man, calling to a potboy. “You’re come to pay for last night, I reckon.”

Myles’s face fell, and he shook his head.

“Then, Misther Cuolahan, as you don’t pay, and as there was a fight last night—and there always is a fight when you and Patsy M’Nulty do come together—and the police have been here to-day, you don’t get any more drink here till you’ve paid for your last, and that’s thirteen shillins and two-pence ha’penny. So you’d better get out of this, and get some money.”

He turned and went away, wandering up and down streets,

and whenever he passed a public-house a wild longing seized him, and he looked into the bar, if it was only to see and smell the drink. But if the Fox and Hounds would not trust him, no one would.

There was nothing that he could turn into money, for his pockets were empty: there was not even a pipeful of tobacco to console him, and his pipe was broken; and of all wretched men in Sheffield that day, Myles Cuolahan was the most wretched.

Presently he found himself, as he strolled carelessly along, one of a great crowd listening to a man preaching. He stopped and listened too. It was on a dismal stretch of road and blank space lying outside the town, and some hundreds of people were gathered together while one man spoke to them. He was a stout, well set-up man of fifty or so, handsome and florid in looks, with shaven cheeks, full rich lips, and an aquiline nose, dressed something like an English clergyman. Myles felt the voice of the man, even before he knew what he was saying, thrill through him and make him tremble; for in the shaken and shattered state of his nerves he was open to any emotion. He pressed through the crowd, which, somehow, parted easily to let him through, and, getting gradually to the front, stood in front of the speaker and listened.

"'Tis Father Mathew, bedad!" he said to a man standing by.

It was Father Mathew, the apostle of temperance, haranguing the Sheffield people on their great sin of drunkenness. Myles listened, while his conscience smote him more and more. Presently he trembled and turned pale, for Father Mathew began to describe, almost step by step, his delirium and madness. Yes, all of it—how the clothes of the children went, and the furniture and—"Some one's told him," said Myles—and how the drunken man in his frenzy took the poker to murder the little ones—"He's seen Miss Ferens this morning," said Myles.

He heard no more; for when the preacher went on to talk of other things, he stood still, gazing into space, with the

re-awakened horror of the night upon him. Stood still, while the preacher ended and the people crowded round him to take the pledge, jostling him about ; for his heart was mad with shame and remorse, and he could neither move nor speak.

The crowd dispersed, and Father Mathew, looking round, saw this man almost alone, standing pale and motionless, with quivering lips and fixed eyes. He knew the symptoms.

"My poor man !" he said, with his strong Irish accent and his full, rich voice, "what will I do for you ?"

"Father Mathew," groaned Myles, "where was ye hid last night to see it all ? 'Tis all true. I was mad with the whisky, and I tried to murder the childher, just as you could all the people. Don't tell 'em that 'twas myself that done it."

"I only help those who help themselves," replied the priest.

"And will ye give me the pledge, your riverence?—and me a Prodesdan, and a black, murdering villain to boot ! Will ye give me the pledge that will cure me for iver ?"

The preacher hesitated. Finally, and after much exhortation, he consented to take his promise.

"I, Myles Cuolahan, promise to abstain from all intoxicating liquors, and to prevent as much as possible, by advice and example, intemperance in others."

Myles repeated the words after him, bareheaded, solemn. Then he signed the printed form.

"God grant you grace and strength to keep your pledge," said Father Mathew.

"And now, Myles Cuolahan, where do you live ?"

Myles told him ; and then, encouraged by his recent solemn vow, began to tell him all his story ; to which the priest listened as if his time was not valuable, only bidding him walk with him, as he had another appointment to keep.

They passed a cookshop in the street. Myles turned a hungry eye upon the window, out of which there issued a volume of steam, full warrant of the richness of the good things within. Father Mathew noted it, and without a word led him in, and sat patiently while he ravenously devoured a plate of meat and potatoes. Then he poured out a glass of water and held it towards him.



Myles sipped it, gave a comical look at the priest, and making a wry face, drank it all up.

"When you get on in the world," said Father Mathew, "you will drink coffee; till then, you must drink water."...

"Go home now, Myles," said the priest. "You have had your dinner, and can wait till to-morrow morning. Here is some tobacco for you. Think of your pledge, and wait in all the evening, for I am going to send you a visitor."

They parted presently, and Myles never saw the good priest again.

Myles went home. He no longer wept; he walked erect, in his pocket the pledge that was to save him from himself. He had had a good dinner; he had a handful of tobacco; and, with a light heart and clear conscience, he sprang up the stairs.

But his heart fell at sight of the wretched room, the scene of all his troubles—deserted, too, for the children were gone; and he sat down on the bed and pulled out his pipe with a depression that surprised him. Even the memory of the pledge failed to put him in good spirits.

At six o'clock, or thereabouts, some one ran up the stairs. It was little Jack, who opened the door, and creeping quietly in, sat on the bed and threw his arm round Myles's neck.

"I'm not afraid, Myles," he whispered. "Miss Ferens has got Norah; but I won't stay where she sent me, and I've come back here. I've had dinner and tea too. You won't do me any harm, will you, Myles?"

Myles pulled out the pledge, with great pride, and showed it to the boy; and then they spent an hour in building castles in the air of the great things they would do, now there was to be no more money spent in drink. But then Myles grew silent, and began to walk up and down the room, slowly at first, but presently faster and faster. At last he cried out, as if the dreadful truth were extorted from him—

"O Jack! the pledge hasn't cured me at all at all; and I've got a live divil inside o' me again! What will I do?"

Jack looked on in terror while Myles paced the little room, with his wild eyes rolling backwards and forwards, and his body swinging uneasily, as if he were at sea in a rough night.

There was to be one more visitor, though, in this, the most eventful day in all Myles Cuolahan's life. A doctor this time, who called about eight o'clock. Finding the room dark, he went away and bought candles, without saying a word. Jack lit one, and he turned to the patient whose story he knew already from Father Mathew.

"Take off your clothes and go to bed," he said, keeping his eyes full upon him.

Myles obeyed without a word, but there was a dangerous glimmer in his look as he shiftily glanced at the doctor. Jack saw his eye catch at the poker, and instantly edged away in its direction, seizing it furtively when Myles's back was turned.

He was in bed, but his eyes rolled backwards and forwards with a strange and dreadful wildness.

"Go downstairs, boy, and bring me a glass and a jug of water."

Jack, glad of an opportunity of getting the poker out of the room hastened on his errand.

The doctor sat down and looked at his patient. Myles said never a word, but glanced uneasily at his bedside, as if with a desire to escape.

When Jack came up, the doctor put some crystals into the tumbler, and poured water over them.

"Now, Myles Cuolahan, my fine fellow, you've got to go to sleep; and it's no use you trying to keep awake, because this is hydrate of chloral, and go to sleep you must. Leave off rolling your eyes, my man, and drink it off."

Myles drank it and lay back. For a minute or two he kept his eyes shut. Then he started up in bed and began to moan. The doctor laid him back.

"More chloral," he said. "Now, Myles, I've got to see you asleep before I go; and perhaps there will be other drunken rascals besides yourself waiting for me to-night. Now, then, off you go."

Again the doctor dosed his patient, and time after time he started back to sleeplessness and torture. As for Jack, he had long since fallen back upon his mattress, and was

now sleeping soundly, wearied out with the last night's watching and terror.

"We must try something else, then," said the doctor. "You mustn't take any more chloral, though your nerves are like so many red hot wires. Now, Myles, look at me."

He bent over him, with his eyes full upon the raving man, and compelled him to look him in the face. Then he made a few passes with his hands, and Myles closed his eyes. He had fallen into a sleep, at first mesmeric, and then natural.

"Sleep now," said the doctor, "for twelve hours, and you will be cured. Wake up once, and you will be a raving maniac."

It was past twelve o'clock when he got his patient comfortably off. He had had but little sleep the night before; the thought crossed him that if Myles awoke it might be death to the boy, and so he stayed and watched by the bedside. From time to time he listened to the breathing of the sleeper: it was full, deep, and regular.

At three o'clock Jack woke up. "Let me watch now," he whispered. "I am not afraid of him."

"Wake me if he moves or opens his eyes." And throwing himself on Jack's mattress, the doctor was asleep in a moment.

. . . . .

It was at two o'clock in the afternoon that Myles Cuolahan woke up. Jack was by his bedside. "Myles," he whispered, "have you had enough sleep? The doctor said you was to sleep till you woke up of your own accord."

He sat up in bed and looked round. Everything was changed with him. The delirium had passed away with the blessed sleep: his forehead and his hands were cool: his eyes were calm: he remembered all; and, better than everything, the first thing he thought of was the pledge.

"Jack, ashore, it's a happy man I am this morning, and yesterday was a blessed day. And now I'll get up."



## CHAPTER IV.

MISS FERENS came to see him the next day, but without Norah.

"Of course," she said, "I shall not let Norah come back yet."

"Av coorse," said Myles humbly.

"Not till I am sure that you intend to keep the pledge that you have taken. And even then—but we shall see. Now, how are you going to live? Have you got no money at all?"

Myles shook his head.

"How much do you want to start you with?"

"There's Jack," he said, "he's had no breakfast, and he'll have no dinner—no more shall I, for that matther."

"I will find breakfast and dinner for both of you. But to start you in trade again?"

"Tinpence will do it, with the blessin' of the Lord."

"Tenpence—ten—pence?"

"It's this way," said Myles. "With tinpence I buy a thousand needles—that's tinpence. I tie thim up in bundles of five-and-twenty. Four five-and-twenties is a hundred—five two hundreds is a thousand—four—tens—tens—bad sthress to it! how much is it?"

"Forty, I suppose."

"I never could learn the multiplication table. When I was Jack's size there, I went to Misther M'Brearty's school in Belfast. The sight of thim rows of figures always made me ill, and Pat M'Brearty told my father wunst that I was a born dunce. So says my father, taking the book to him in one hand and a mighty big stick in the other, 'Myles, let's learn the tables.' You see, my father was very long-sighted, and obliged to hould the book close to the candle, where I could see it too; and bedad, I rattled off the multiplication table like Alexander the Great. So my father went to see the masther. 'Bad end to your sowl,' says he, 'Myles knows his tables.' 'Does he?' says M'Brearty. 'Let's have him up, then.' So I was had up again, and bruk down."

"But about the needles, Mr. Cuolahan?"

"Forty, was it? I sell the needles at a penny a bundle, and I get forty pence—forty; and I gave tinpence for thim—that is thirty pence profit, isn't it? Lend me tinpence, miss, and I'll bless you for iver. I'll keep the pledge, niver fear; for I've had a lesson, and I'm a changed man."

Miss Ferens lent him the tenpence, which Myles returned the day after, and the new life began in earnest.

A changed man, yes; but though the delirium had left him, the craving after strong drink was strong upon him still, and for many and many a day Myles Cuolahan could not pass a public-house without a feeling as if strong ropes were dragging him to its doors. But changed, save for the same liability to temptation; and poor Biddy's prophecy was not destined to come true. "Lave it!" she had cried in her bitterness. "They never lave it." She reckoned without the lesson which a night's misery was to give her husband, and without the eloquence of Father Mathew; for Myles left it. Thenceforth he was like a son of Rechab, inasmuch as, for a vow he had made, he would taste no strong drink for evermore. At first his ways were feeble and his steps trembling; for every street has its taverns, and every tavern has its long, invisible tentacles, like some gigantic polypus, stretched out to claim and drag to its nest some poor sinner like Myles. It was only in the evening, when safe at home, that he felt happy. There—for his trade was a prosperous one, and the money was no longer spent in whisky—he would sit talking over his early days in Ireland with little Jack, smoking his pipe after the day's fatigue, and drinking strong coffee, which Jack made for him.

There was considerable annoyance felt in certain circles at the defection of Myles Cuolahan. Others had left the club at the Fox and Hounds before, for different reasons, indeed. There were generally a few who enjoyed the privileges of non-resident or foreign membership, some being retained by the extraordinary affection of the Newgate and Millbank warders, some being away in the country on business, some perhaps laid up in hospital, working off the effects of

the last free fight. But none, up to this moment, had gone over to the enemy; there had been no temperance man in the club, and it was strongly felt that the resentment of the members should in some form be conveyed to the offender.

Mrs. Patsy M'Nulty, the little Welshwoman, undertook to be the representative of the wish, and in that capacity paid a visit to Myles one evening, when he had just made his coffee, and was sitting with Jack in calm meditation on his own victory.

She knocked at the door, came in softly, and sat down, after shaking hands with Myles and patting Jack on the head.

She talked, as I have said already, nothing but the finest book English, quite like an old-fashioned novel.

"You are quite well, Myles Cuolahan? And what is the reason why you have abandoned your former associates? Has prosperity so far changed your disposition towards my husband and the rest as to prevent your meeting them again in friendship?"

"Mrs. M'Nulty," returned Myles with pride, "I have taken the pledge. Will ye have a drop of coffee?" She shook her head, and taking a little bottle out of her pocket, removed the cork, and ostentatiously took a longish pull. Then she handed it over to Myles, who took it mechanically, and held it to his nose. It was—it was, indeed, the finest Irish whisky, and for a moment, while his heart melted to his old friend, his knees shook and his hands trembled. Then little Jack, who was watching the proceedings with an anxious eye, quietly took the bottle out of his hand, and gave it back to the woman.

"Myles only drinks coffee and tea now," he said. "Don't tempt him with the whisky."

"Tempt him!" she cried, flashing into a white-hot rage. "I tempt him? Let me tell you, youthful offspring of the devil, that I tempt no one. What! cannot Myles Cuolahan follow the inclinations of his heart without the interference of a child? Are you again in leading-strings, Myles Cuolahan? Will you be put back into the cradle? Shall we dress you



in long clothes? Shall we give you to Jack to carry about the streets? Are you"—

"All the same, Mrs. M'Nulty, I've taken the pledge, and I'm not going to meet your husband at the Fox and Hounds any more."

"Then, Mr. Cuolahan," she replied, rising with the dignity of a duchess, "if you will not drink with my husband, you shall fight with him. I'm going now to fetch him from the club. We shall be back in the court in five minutes. We will see, Mr. Cuolahan who takes the pledge, Mr. Cuolahan who is led by the nose by a measly little boy—Mr. Cuolahan who will not drink whisky—which is the best man. Poor Myles! Patsy M'Nulty will grind you and crush you to powder."

She was a very extraordinary young woman this, because, though she was in a furious rage, being indeed a lady of a disposition as fitful and as uncertain as the Sea of Galilee, she spoke no faster, and only articulated her words a little more clearly; only, when she had finished, she brandished the bottle in Myles's face triumphantly, pulled out the cork, and took another long pull. After which she went quite peacefully away.

"Myles, must you fight?"

Myles nodded, and made such preparations as the exigencies of the case allowed; that is, he tightened his waistband, loosened his shirt-collar, took off the long, many-pocketed coat, and then, followed by Jack, he walked slowly down the stairs and out into the street without his hat.

Myles, although anxious to be first in the field, found Patsy M'Nulty waiting for him, and shook hands warmly with his old friend. Neither made any reference to the impending combat; but after congratulating Patsy on his recent victory—he had defeated the Tipton champion only a week before for twenty-five pounds a side—he recognised a few other friends among the crowd, and prepared for business by turning back his shirt-cuffs. Mrs. M'Nulty, with a keen look of expectation, sat in the front row of the stalls, so to speak, like a critic on a first night. The woman was one of that class who, in

Spain, attend every bullfight, in Rome would have gone to every exhibition of lions and Christians, and nowadays take pleasure at Hurlingham. She was, as her husband once mildly complained, almost too fond of fighting.

Round one :—I think I have mentioned Myles Cuolahan's gigantic hand ; to the big hand was attached a wrist of iron and an arm of steel. He was small, spare, slight, but he was active. His antagonist, a big, heavy man, would have been more than a match for Myles, but for one thing—he was in bad condition. A fortnight's training had been followed by a week's steady drinking, and Patsy was puffy. First blood, and frantic cheers for Patsy.

"Patsy M'Nulty ! Patsy M'Nulty ! Death to the teetotaller !"

It was not Mrs. M'Nulty who interrupted the business of the fight by any such vulgar cry as this ; it was quite a common outsider, a lady of no education, of Sheffield extraction, with no eye for the artistic beauties of a fight.

Quite the contrary. Mrs. M'Nulty sat perfectly quiet ; and when the apparent advantage came to her husband, she was the only one who observed that it was not real, and that a great deal of force was expended by her husband with a very small result—only, in fact, a scratch. She nodded approvingly to Myles, as much as to say that it was very neatly done on his part ; only a single inch less to the left, and Patsy's big fist would have finished the fight at once. As it was, a mere trifle of flesh off the cheek—nothing.

Round twenty :—The fickle populace. They are cheering Myles now, for Patsy M'Nulty is rolling about like some great three-decker in a storm with its rudder gone. His great, good-natured face is beaten into a huge pulpy mass ; his eyes are bunged up ; his nose is bleeding ; his mouth is swelling fast, and in front of him, as lusty as when he began, is Myles Cuolahan, his bright eyes sparkling, his lips set back, his whole frame dancing with the delight of battle and victory. Finally he plants a tremendous blow, which resounds like the stroke of a hammer on an anvil, in the

chest of his mighty antagonist. Patsy M'Nulty reels and falls, and rises no more. Myles is the victor.

Mrs. M'Nulty claps her hands, not because her husband has fallen, but because the battle has been conducted on the soundest principles of art, and with considerable skill on both sides. And presently the festive party breaks up, Patsy being led home by his wife, who expatiates on the various rounds all the time she is attending to his bruises, as if she were herself a professor.

Myles is dragged by a few attendants in the direction of the Fox and Hounds, but breaks away and peaceably goes home with Jack. Then popularity becomes contempt.

"Ugh! ugh! Teetotaller—Myles the teetotarel!"

"You're a fine lot!" said Myles, feeling his wrist, which began to show signs of having been too hard worked. "You're a poor lot! Ye shouted when I went down, and ye shouted when Patsy went down. Jack, niver you mind how people shout; they're only like dumb sheep that follow the leader—like the Belfast Orange boys when they sing 'Croppies lie down.' I'm proud o' meself, Jack, and proud o' the pledge; but then—'tis the divil not to drop in, in a friendly way, after the fight too, for a *shan aghan*. What wud my father say, and my grandfather, an' all the Cuolahans, to see me goin' away home to have coffee with my pipe after a fight?"

Next evening Miss Ferens called upon him, bringing little Norah.

"Good heavens! man, what is the matter?" For Myles's face had a patchy appearance, swollen in some places and dented in others, a strip of plaster crossed his forehead, and another adorned his lip, while a huge discoloured stain upon his eye showed where Patsy's fist had found a temporary home.

"He's been fighting," cried Jack in great glee; "he's been fighting Patsy M'Nulty."

Myles stood in a deprecatory attitude. "It is all true," it seemed to say. "I am the conquering hero; but not too much praise, if you please. Do not overrate what is really a small episode in a glorious career."



"You disgraceful man!" said Miss Ferens.

Never had the current of Myles's thoughts been so strikingly disturbed, except, perhaps, on that memorable day when he awoke, and, behold! it was but a dream. No praise at all then!

"You disgraceful man."

"It was Patsy M'Nulty," Jack interposed. In his eyes the victory of Myles over that great bruiser was more glorious than Blenheim.

Myles said nothing, only looked straight before him.

"Fighting, indeed! . . . and for a man who has only just taken the pledge!"

Myles pulled it out of his pocket, unfolded and read it, with a dreadful fear that there was something in it against fighting.

"Now, Myles Cuolahan, I came to see you this evening on important business, and I am sorry indeed to see you in this deplorable condition."

"I bet him," murmured the discomfited Myles.

"Now listen. It has long been on my mind that you are not a proper person to bring up a child like Norah . . . not a proper person at all."

"Jack always washed and dressed her," said the poor father.

"Jack can't go on always washing and dressing her. Besides, Jack must work for himself. I am going to take Norah from you. . . . Don't look indignant, Myles; it is for your own good. I do not live in Sheffield; I live in Bedesbury. Norah shall stay with me and be my daughter. I will educate her and be kind to her . . . yes, Myles, I will be very kind to her"—her plain features softened as she spoke—"very kind to the little one. When she is fifteen or sixteen, she shall herself choose whether to live with you or with me. You shall see her as often as you please, say two or three times a year."

"And Jack too?"

"And Jack too. You will leave this dreadful place, and go back to your old life on the road, but without the drink-

ing. Send me every week what you can save, and remember that you will be saving for the child."

"Ay . . . But Jack can't go on the tramp yet. He's too little. What will I do about Jack?"

"Never mind me, Myles," said Jack, with the wisdom of thirty. "You get away from here, and I'll do, somehow."

"Mrs. Bastable wants to have you, Jack; but I don't know."

"If Mrs. What-is-her-name," observed Miss Ferens, "wants Jack, and she is a respectable person, you had better send him there."

"You wouldn't like Jack, as well as Norah, mum?" said Myles, with an ingratiating wave of his hand. It was so big, and now so swollen with the recent fight, that it was like waving a fan.

"Certainly not . . .," replied Miss Ferens. "Certainly not; that is . . .," observing Jack flushing with wounded pride—"that is . . ., I could not possibly have a boy in my house; a little girl I should like, but no boys. I could not bear the responsibility."

It was late when she went away. But she bore with her, triumphantly, little Norah sound asleep in her arms. And as she drove back to her lodgings a smile of triumph lay upon her lips.

"I do not expect they will find their way to Bedesbury. Norah, my darling, we will be all in all to each other. You shall be my child, the child the Lord ought to have given me long ago. . . . Myles will break the pledge . . . they always do. He will get killed in some drunken brawl. The boy will disappear in this great town, or go up to London, or somewhere, and you, my Norah, shall never know your parents, and shall be my own daughter, my pride and my joy, my pretty, pretty, black-eyed darling."

"Bedesbury, Jack," said Norah's father, undressing for the night—"remember Bedesbury. Miss Ferens is right about Norah. About the fighting I don't know. Father Mathew said nothing against it; and, well—maybe, the next fightin she won't hear nothing of. Mrs. Bastable wants you, Jack,

to make you a page, she says. She's a quare crayture, and her husband's a quare crayture. She's the fool, and he's the knave, so it's betwix and between. They'll be good to you; we'll try thim for a month, and if you don't like it, then we'll try something else. On the tramp again; well, I'll miss poor Biddy, and I'll miss you, Jacky, and I'll be a lonely man; no dhrink and nothin'. Put out the candle, Jack."

## CHAPTER V.

MR. BASTABLE, justly considered one of the most remarkable men in Sheffield, lived with his wife in one of a long row of houses, all exactly the same in appearance, colour, and age, which formed a narrow street in one of the poorer quarters of the town. His profession, according to a zinc plate affixed to the door, was that of "Herbalist and Bird-stuffer;" and in the window, to show that he was not a liar, stood a case filled with birds which had once been stuffed. It was so long ago that they were tumbling off their wires in various stages of decay, and lay about, some with eyeless sockets, some with the stuffing come out in a shameful manner, some with featherless tails and wings—a gruesome spectacle, reminding the travelled native of the Natural History Department in the British Museum, and conveying to the untravelled a new view of nature's wonders. On a dish beside the glass case stood, in further confirmation of his professional pretensions, a bundle of herbs, black and withered, which might have been groundsel, or chickweed, or anything. No doubt they were rare and valuable, culled on the higher slopes of Himalaya, and possessing curious medicinal properties known only to their owner. Though the front room thus appeared to be the surgery or consulting-room, it was in the "back parlour"—I quote Mrs. Bastable—where Mr. Bastable received Myles Cuolahan when he brought Jack for final inspection after Miss Ferens's last visit. This was much the larger room of the two, because Mr. Bastable, at considerable expense, had built out an



addition to it in the form of an arched alcove, about ten feet broad and the same deep, where had been formerly a window. For some purposes of his own he had provided the back of this recess with tightly-closing shutters, by which he could exclude every glimmer of daylight. At present the shutters were not let down, and the full light of day, with such brilliancy of sun as you might expect in Sheffield at twelve in the morning, streamed in through the small window upon Mr. Bastable and his belongings. Red curtains of heavy texture, but rusty colour, were looped up on either side of the recess; its floor was raised about six inches above the level of the rest of the room, and was covered with canvas, on which was painted a strange device, which Jack was as yet unable to explain. It was, in reality, a circle with the twelve signs of the zodiac. Pushed carelessly into a corner was a chair, the like of which, for magnificence, Jack had never seen; for it was overlaid with scarlet cloth, it had gilded feet, and on the cloth, embroidered in gold, was a large Jerusalem cross, very gorgeous to behold. The rest of the room had nothing remarkable in it; in fact, it was empty, except for a common deal table and a couple of cane chairs; and there was no carpet.

Mr. Bastable requested Myles to sit down, and then began to examine the boy—feeling the suppleness of his fingers and looking at his eyes, as if he were purchasing a colt or a slave—talking all the while.

“Yes, Cuolahan, yes—we want a boy sometimes; not for odd jobs, but for business that requires a lad something out of the way. This boy—he’s very young—arms pretty good—hands a little too large—fingers rather clumsy—pull up your trousers, boy, and show your legs. Ah! he’s very young, very young indeed—but he’s good-looking, got the face of a gentleman, somehow—he might suit my purposes. Not your own boy, I believe, Cuolahan. That makes it come cheaper to part with him, don’t it? Well, and what do you put his figure at?”

“Eh?”

“Don’t be rapacious, my friend. One boy, for whom I

gave a—well—more than you'd believe, ran away only a week after I bought him. What do you think he's worth?"

"Well," said Myles, a little taken aback, "he's not worth very much yet, but give him his meals regular with potatoes and pudding, and treat him kindly, and he'll be worth a good deal in course of time; and he won't ask for any wages."

"Wages, man! I am going to buy the boy—I always buy them out and out."

Myles seized Jack and dragged him within the protection of his big fists. "Buy my Jack, will you?"

"Why, he isn't your son, you know."

"I may be a Prodesdan," said Myles, "and a black teetotaller—more's the pity and the shame—but I'm not a Pagan. He isn't mine, and he's nobody's but the Lord Almighty's, and would I sell him? Buy my Jack! Come now, Misther Bastable, it's joking you are—say so, man, or else wait there till I smash ye!"

Mr. Bastable hastened to make the peace.

"Come, I thought you wanted to sell the boy. Look here, Cuolahan! I like the boy's looks, and he'll do for me. He's nine years old. Leave him with me for a year or two while you go on your beat again. I will dress him, feed him, and be kind to him. I don't beat boys in this house, and I don't swear at them—whatever others may do," he added, meaningly.

"'Tis the misthress, perhaps," said Myles, "undertakes that department, like Pat M'Swire's wife wid the apprentices in Belfast."

"No," replied the other. "However, leave him with me: let him understand that he has got to obey, and we shall all be satisfied."

"What is it, now, the boy will do? Will he stuff birds? Bedad, Misther Bastable, them in the window is in a bad way, wid all your stuffin'."

"Perhaps. I want him to help in the business. My wife, the famous clairvoyante"—

"The what?"

"The clairvoyante. You do not understand. She has

the gift of communication with the spirits of the other world."

"Twixt us and harm!" murmured Myles, crossing himself, though he was a "Prodesdan."

"They told her where to look for such a boy as we want. They mean well, the spirits, though they certainly somehow have an awkward way of showing their benevolence—— What is the matter, my friend?"

For Myles shrieked out and began to dance.

"Who was it?" he cried. "Jack, 'twas you. No, 'twasn't. Misther Bastable, you are afther your tricks with me, and ye'd best not. Look here!"

He drew a long pin from his calf, and exhibited it.

"I can't help it," said Mr. Bastable calmly; "things go on in this house that--well, the spirits won't hurt the boy. They told me so. They told me, too, that he is destined to be a great man by their agency—another reason why you should let me have him."

"I must find a place for the poor little chap," Myles said with a sigh, "for I'm off again on my old beat, and he's too young to come with me. It's a lonely life I'll have; Norah with Miss Ferens, Bedesbury way, Jack all by himself with you, and me alone with the pledge in me pocket and the cowl'd water lyin' deadly chill in me stomach, for company. Jack, will ye stay with Misther Bastable?"

"If you like, Myles. Come back soon and see me—don't leave me altogether, Myles," cried the child.

"I'll come back, niver you fear, Jack ashore. And you'll be a good boy and a credit to yourself and me,—and—not take to dhrink, eh, Jack?"

So with scant but hearty farewell he left the lad with his new protector, and departed.

Mr. Bastable was a short, thick-set man, of forty or thereabouts. He had the appearance of a workman rather than a man of science, as he sat in his shirt-sleeves, with his right arm partly bare. He wore no collar, and a great shaggy black beard, growing far back at the throat, fell over his breast, and left a white projecting chin like an ivory carving



in the midst of it. A mass of black hair, thick and curly, lay upon his forehead, which was high, but not broad. His eyes were small, and set close together. His nose was long, not broad, but yet coarse, while his lips were thin. It was the face of a man who at first sight repelled you; after a while you became accustomed to him: but the man had no friends. There are, if you think of it, two great classes of men—the one which has friends, and the one which has only acquaintances. Some men, I mean, go through the world without attaching to themselves a single creature who cares for them—who live without the sympathy, and die without the regret, of any one man or woman. Bastable was one of these; all men distrusted him at first sight; all men grew to tolerate him; none grew to like him or to confide in him.

And then his profession was against him.

When Myles was gone, Jack stood looking at him in his fearless way.

"There are many curious things," said his master—"many curious things that take place in this house, which you need not ask anything about. You saw just now how Cuolahan was pricked with a pin. I don't understand these things, and there's no reason why you should. If I hear knocks at night, and tappings in the wainscoting"—as he spoke he pointed to the fireplace, whence there came a faint tapping—"like that"——

"It's a mouse," said Jack.

"We'll call it a mouse," said his master; "*I* never inquire. If at night messages come to the bedside with taps, *I* don't ask if they're mice—I only listen and write them down, and then I go to sleep again. If I walk up the stairs after dark, and feel fingers in my hair, I don't say to myself 'that's mice;' I only stand still, and never move hand nor foot till they leave their hold of me. I don't cry out, because that only exasperates them; and I don't run away, because that drives them wild; and don't you."

Jack did not understand one single syllable.

"Chains I have heard—that was mice, perhaps; also banging open of doors, and smashing of crockery if they get

enraged—as enraged the best of us will get sometimes—whether wise, blessed spirits or sinful men. But that's rare. Only don't you be surprised, whatever you see and hear; and don't you go crying out in the middle of the night, and running down the street yelping, like the last boy I had."

"What should I run away for?" asked Jack.

"What, indeed! What should you say if you was to see the table, this here very identical table, stand up on its hind legs?"

As he spoke, the table began to agitate itself with the agility and grace of a cow, and presently stood up on two legs, presenting its other two to Jack.

"Myles could do that," said the boy unconcernedly. "If he was to try, he could do better hanky than that. I've seen him make a chair walk."

Did he tell you how he did it?" asked Mr. Bastable.

"Yes, once he showed me how he did it with a string, but I've forgotten."

"Well, now you know what to expect. Go downstairs, and you'll find my wife; tell her you've come to be the new boy, and she'll give you some clothes."

Jack found Mrs. Bastable cooking in the front kitchen; that is, she was sitting in front of a great fire on which stood a boiling pot, and she held a hook in her hand. She was a woman of five-and-thirty or so, with singularly light flaxen hair and eyes of a clear pale blue; not the cold grey-blue that goes with a cruel disposition, but a distinct light tint that had no grey at all. They were large eyes, too, which would have been lustrous but for a painful look of expectation that always lingered in them. Her features were soft and characterless, as if they had left the sculptor's hands without the final touch. Her hands were large, soft, and extremely white; and Jack noticed that they shook very much whenever she spoke. At the boy's footsteps she dropped her hook into the fender and gave a little shriek, staring wildly at him.

"I'm the new boy, ma'am," said Jack, advancing boldly, though somewhat startled by the singularity of his reception. She recovered a little, took him by the shoulders, looked him in the face, and then laughed, patting him kindly on the cheek.

"I thought it was one of Them," she said. "Well, it's thoughtful of him to give me another boy, if it's only for companionship; for lonely isn't the word, I do assure you, when he's gone and they're about. The last boy ran away, and his mother came and abused Them, she did. Wasn't it shameful?"

"Who did she abuse?"

"The sperruts, my dear. No consideration for me—no thought of the rage they would fall in—no regard whatever to the property. The way the tongs banged about when she was gone, and me left alone in this awful empty place, was more than words can paint, or music tell, or brush can sing, —Ah!" She paused, and looked round whispering, "Are you afraid of the sperruts, boy?"

"I don't know," said Jack. "What do they do to you?"

"They stroke your face on the stairs and in bed—they rap at windows and doors—they call from the fireplace—they make noises all day long—they get angry and won't let you sleep at night with their noise. And sometimes you see them—here a head, and there a hand, or maybe a sperrut leg."

"I don't think I should be afraid of that," said the boy.

"There used to be dreadful noises all night in our court. Noises don't hurt people."

"Ah!" she replied, "it's very brave of you to say so, and I hope you'll act according, and not go running away, bringing the neighbours down on us, and discredit on a woman who only wants to live quiet. For it's a hard life, after all, though my Benjamin will have it it's a glorious life—chosen, you see, and selected by the sperruts themselves. There isn't a house in all Sheffield—no, nor in all Yorkshire, that's haunted like ours. There isn't a mesmeriser in England that's like my husband; and there isn't in all the world round a clari-voyong like ME."

As she spoke she stood upright with an air of pride for a moment, and then suddenly dropped her arms to her side, and, while her colour changed and the look of expectation in her eyes grew intensified, gazing into space, she murmured, "He is coming."



Jack thought she was play-acting. At the same time the air about him seemed suddenly cold; and then there were heard rappings about all over the room, apparently under his feet, in the ceiling, behind the fireplace, at the door. He took no notice. The door opened, and Mr. Bastable appeared. He threw a hurried glance at his wife, adjusted her hair, which was in some disorder, smoothed out her dress—Jack noticed that she preserved her rigid look, and neither moved nor gave the least sign of comprehending what was done to her—and then turned to the boy.

“Tut, tut!” he muttered. “Too bad! I sent you down to be dressed. Here, take off all these things.”

He hastily undressed Jack, and looking in a drawer, drew out a suit of green and scarlet cloth, which he put on him quickly and nervously.

“You are to come upstairs, and you are not to say a single word, mind—not a word. If the visitor speaks to you, don’t answer. Look as if you do not hear him and do not see him. If you dare to disobey me”——

It was the first time the boy had ever been threatened, and a new feeling came over him of resistance and rebellion. Nevertheless, he held his peace.

The dress which he wore was picturesque and theatrical. It consisted of a green cap, something like a fez, with a scarlet tassel; a green jacket, embroidered with scarlet; and a pair of short trousers, terminating above the knee, where they were gathered in by an elastic band. The jacket was buttoned, so as to hide the common coarse shirt he wore; and Mr. Bastable had dragged off his shoes and stockings, so that he was barefooted as well as barelegged. Altogether the costume had an Oriental look, only Jack did not know it.”

As for his master, he too was metamorphosed. He wore a four-sided pyramidal cap of some black material, with two lappets hanging down, one over each ear. Over his shoulder, suspended by a crimson scarf, hung a sword, whose hilt was studded with sparkling gems, real or false; he wore a broad girdle, covered with the same curious figures that Jack had remarked on the circle round the throne in the alcove up-

stairs, the signs of the zodiac. But, besides these, there were other things: the Labarum, the cross and circle conjoined, the turtle's head, plain crosses, plain circles, circles with smaller circles placed within, and trines, the whole interlaced by an inscription, running in and out among the figures, in Hebrew characters. Two daggers lay crosswise over his breast. Beneath all this a pure white linen robe, reaching to his knees; and below them sandals, with red leather fastenings, which crossed each other halfway up his bare legs. His arms—great, massive arms, with enormous sinews standing on them like ropes—were bare, like his legs, save for short brown leather sleeves, on each of which was marked a Maltese cross; and in his hand he carried, when he came into the kitchen, a curious implement, fashioned in ivory or very white wood, which at first looked like a *fantaisie* of intercrossing lines, and finally resolved itself into what Jack soon learned to call the pentacle, that odd fancy of the occult sciences, in which, by means of an equilateral and equiangular pentagon, you get the five senses represented by the five angles; and by joining the angles, and so forming five isosceles, and as many oblique-angled triangles, you get the functions of the Deity; and by drawing other lines you develop a bewildering mass of symbolism which makes the brain to stagger at the mere contemplation. The mesmerist's face was changed, too; for the great bushy whiskers were brushed straight down, and added to the luxuriance of his long black beard, while the chin, whiter and more polished than before, seemed to stand out in a more aggressive manner. All these details, which I give for the right understanding of the man, were not, of course, taken in all at once by the child; but the general impression produced upon him was, that he was experiencing quite a new set of sensations, and that he was about to witness some very remarkable "hanky," in which he was proudly to bear a part.

In truth, Mr. Bastable's house was the principal scene at that time of what has since become so common as to be passed by either with a grin of contempt or a deprecatory wave of the hand. "Do not," said a lady to me once,—

"do not take to table-turning and spiritual *séances*. You are fit for better things." I was pleased and flattered by this tribute to my superior promise (not since realised), and it was not till I had left her that I began to speculate on what she meant. She meant two things, but I was not certain which she meant. Spiritualism, she thought, must be a humbug, in which case everybody is meant for better things; or it must be a reality, which, up to the present time, has done no good for mankind. After all, it was no great compliment; but it illustrates the attitude which people assume towards pretensions which may or may not be true, but which are nevertheless supported by those whose veracity, *si qua fides*, if there is any trust to be placed in position, education, honour, and the responsibilities attaching to the grand modern word of gentleman, ought to be beyond all doubt. It is not my purpose to write a treatise on spiritual manifestations, either here or anywhere else. I only record what Jack saw and experienced during his stay in the house of the Bastables. As for the woman, she was a clairvoyante by profession. What she did or said was done or said, as in the case of the prophetesses of Delphi, Dodona, and the Syrian shrines, under the influence of a mysterious power which, since the oracles are dumb, seems fallen permanently into the hands of gentlemen adventurers like the illustrious Count Cagliostro and Mr. Benjamin Bastable.

There was a certain grandeur in the carriage and bearing of the man when, his preparations completed, he turned to the door and led the way. As he turned, though her back was towards him, the woman turned too, and followed silently, moving as if with a painful effort, her limbs being rigid and fixed. Jack, though nothing had been said, followed too, with a sense that it was expected of him.

They went upstairs, this strange procession of three, all silent, into the mystic, though shabby, back parlour. It was changed since Jack had left it a quarter of an hour before. Then it was poorly furnished, with its wretched table and one or two chairs. Now it had a Turkey carpet upon the floor; tapestry hung round the wall; there was a writing-table,



with several curious articles, the nature of which Jack could not guess, in one corner. The little window at the back was closed, and a soft light filled the room, which came from an opening in the chimney, shaped and coloured like a human eye. On the opposite wall was a mirror, which reflected the rays, and showed that the eye was enclosed in a triangle, over which were certain letters in Hebrew character. In the centre of the room was a circle, formed of forty-nine—seven times seven—small vases, in the midst of which was a triangle formed of three swords. And the alcove itself was hung round not only with the red curtains that Jack had seen there before, but also with rich, heavy drapery of a deep scarlet, against which the throne stood out, splendid in its decorations. It all seemed wonderful and incomprehensible to the boy, who stood at the door waiting.

Mr. Bastable motioned his finger, without looking at his wife, to the throne. She obeyed instantly, though, as in the previous case, she was not looking at him, and seated herself in the great chair. He threw a long white robe, of some curious soft stuff, like a Madagascar lamba, over her. Then he put a white wand in Jack's hands.

"Stand at the door, here, and do not move or speak. If I put you anywhere else, do exactly what you see I want you to do. Neither speak, nor listen, nor move. And whatever happens, remember that you will not be hurt, *unless you move*. Do you understand? Tell me what you have to do."

"Neither speak nor move. I'm not afraid," said Jack, still confident that he was going to take part in some capital scene of conjuring.

I have, I think, made it clear that he was a child of no education whatever. Consequently, he had not imbibed the idea of superstition—knew nothing about Bogy the Terrible, hobgoblin, or the devil; and, owing to Myles's more than parental care, had not conceived the idea of fear. It never entered into Jack's untutored brain that anybody would deliberately try to hurt him. Fighting—of course between people of the same age, and fairly matched as to physical strength and skill—was one of the delights of life, as he had

already experienced. Bigger boys had bullied him; then Jack had learned to show such fight as was in his power, making the process of bullying unpleasant and troublesome to the big victor, and had received such punishment as his oppressor had strength to give. But he had perfect confidence in grown-up people. It is one of the virtues of the working classes that they are seldom rough or brutal to children. The women whack their own, out of an unconquerable instinct to assert their power in *some* direction, rather than from the wisdom and experience of tried virtue; the little girls slap the smaller boys and girls, still with a sense of the responsibilities of power; but the men generally whack no helpless little ones; and you will find—at least, I have found—that the lads of nineteen or twenty regard their fathers, if not with that honour and reverence which the straight-walking Christians in the higher ranks command, at least as personal friends, who have trodden on Saturday nights, and still tread, the same flowery paths as themselves.

"Where," asked Bastable, making passes with a wand, "where is he now?"

"Six doors off," murmured his wife in a hollow voice, her eyes looking farther away than ever.

"Where now?" a moment after.

"At the next house."

He pulled a string which hung behind the tapestry at his back; there were steps in the hall; the street-door was shut heavily; the red curtains of the alcove dropped as if by themselves before the clairvoyante; Mr. Bastable seated himself at his table, and began to adjust his instruments, and the visitor appeared.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE visitor was a small thin man of about fifty, carefully and precisely dressed in a blue frock-coat and white trousers. He carried himself with his head a little on one side, as one who was capable of making shrewd remarks. He wore small whiskers, being otherwise clean shaven.

His lips were full and mobile, as those of a sensitive man; and his eyes, when they were not lit with the mirth of a humorous nature, had a far-off look which somewhat resembled the expression in those of Keziah Bastable. When he sat down, his shoulders dropped and his head bent forward, showing that he was one who habitually sat over a desk. Captain Perrymont, of the Royal Navy, was an astrologer and alchemist, an inquirer into old allegories and symbolism; one who thought there was once a time when people knew a way to lift the veil, and who was spending the best years of his life in trying to re-discover it, in his old house near Esbrough.

Apparently it was not his first visit to the house, for he did not appear in the least surprised at the preparations. Looking about him with an amused air, his eye fell on Jack, and he drew the boy towards himself and examined him critically.

"Eh! the new youngster? He's got on the same uniform as the last. Bastable, I've told you before that gold lace does not matter. Nice boy; nice boy! will he stand quiet, or will he scream and bolt, as the other one did, like a nigger paid with hot pitch?"

"He'll stand quiet," said Bastable, with an attempt at dignity combined with respect. The effect of great submission and great dignity combined was as ludicrous—only Jack's education was too incomplete to enable him to see the incongruity of the thing—as if the Archbishop of Canterbury, in full pontificals, were entreating a Royal Duke in plain clothes not to kick him; or the whole proceeding had the air of being behind the scenes during a dress rehearsal, provided any of the performers had ever been behind the scenes, and could make the comparison.

"Where's your wife, Bastable?—dressed in all her finery, and shut up in her box? Ah! she might as well be dressed for her kitchen-work, you know. What's the good of all these flummeries?"

"Captain Perrymont!—for Heaven's sake, sir! They



might hear and be offended. Remember how we failed last time."

"That was because the boy sheered off in the middle."

"Yes, sir, yes,"—Bastable was growing nervous,—“but the books order it so, and I daren't go against the books. And now Captain Perrymont—now that we have got the greatest and most glorious chance—for Heaven's sake, don't spoil it by offending Them! The boy's pure, and the woman's deeper gone than ever I knew her before; and I've been engaged for months getting up the details. Do be quiet, Captain Perrymont.”

The Captain looked queerly at the man, as if he only half believed him.

"Come, Bastable, if there is anything to be done, let us do it."

"Take my chair, sir. There! Of course you will not speak. You are not afraid?"

"I afraid!"

"I need not tell you, sir, as a master of the divine art, that there is danger—very great danger—if the rules are broken. Boy, stand here."

He placed Jack upright in the circle of cressets, within the triangle of the swords.

"Remember what I told you," he whispered in an agitated voice. "Whatever you see or hear, be silent, and do not dare to move outside the triangle."

He lit the cressets, which at first burned dimly, sending up a volume of white smoke of a pleasant, heavy odour. Then he knelt down in the corner of the room, and began, in a high-pitched monotone, an incantation of which Jack understood nothing. At the same time the great curtain before the alcove fell back, and Jack remembered—the last thing before the smoke curled round him and he could see nothing at all—the figure of Mrs. Bastable, erect on her platform, covered with a purple robe, in an attitude of expectation, one hand raised as if to listen.

The wizard went on with his chant. Captain Perrymont sat in the corner, his chin upon his hand, watching and

listening. Outside, the people who live in the present, and are content with the philosophy of the phenomenal, went backwards and forwards in the street, ignorant that a few feet from them was a man performing rites which Catherine de' Medici might have witnessed and Albertus Magnus invented.

The Captain saw wreaths of white smoke, intertwined like ropes, twisting round and round and forming a cone, the apex of which was under the bright eye in the ceiling. Through this the light fell upon the smoke in coloured rays. The Captain's head reeled as he saw the endless wreaths of smoke curling round and round; strange sounds, half musical, fell upon his ear; the perfume mounted to his brains, and the slow monotone of Bastable fell on his ears like the low notes of the organ, without which the hymn is imperfect, and which are yet unnoticed.

He was roused by a voice—Bastable's. The wizard had ceased his hymn: the smoke, tinged with a hundred lights, was curling round and round; in the alcove stood the clairvoyante, gazing into the mist with fixed and strained eyes.

"What does the boy see?" asked Bastable.

She replied without hesitation: "The smoke of the cressets stands away from the boy like a tent. He hears sounds which are not like the words of any speech; he sees figures moving in the wreaths—human heads and arms. There are faces that come and go. He looks round him, and is not afraid. They beckon and nod at him; he only laughs. Hands clutch at him for a moment, and then fall back in the smoke. He has no fear, because he remembers his orders, neither to speak nor to move. The forms become thicker, and the faces fiercer and more threatening."

"What does the boy see now?" asked Mr. Bastable again, after a pause.

The clairvoyante replied once more, in a clear, cold voice: "The boy is in the first circle of the jealous guardian spirits. He is surrounded by those who would, if they could, take him by the throat and wring the life out of him. But still he is not afraid."

"He is in the circle," whispered Mr. Bastable, "into which, with all our science, we cannot penetrate, Captain Perrymont. Only the pure in heart—the innocent in intent—can see the things that he sees. When we dissolve the spell, he shall remember nothing."

"What now does the boy see?" he asked again.

"The smoke has changed its colour from the thick pure white to a pale rosy hue. The angry faces have vanished, and the threatening figures gone. Now he sees forms with glowing robes, and strange, cold faces, which float round and round, seeming not to regard him. He is in the second circle."

"He can pass no further," said Bastable. "No mortal can see beyond the second circle. They are the only spirits we can communicate with, unless the higher spirits come voluntarily. Shall we question them, Captain Perrymont?"

"Ask them if I am on the right track in my great endeavour."

"They hear your question. Spirits! if it may be, speak to the boy through the clairvoyante."

The answer came, as before, from the priestess: "The knowledge of old can always be found again. But the secrets of Nature can only be given to those who seek for the good of others."

Captain Perrymont groaned aloud.

"Ask them," he said, "if they are happy."

This time there came no answer at all.

"Ask them of the future," said the Captain.

"Your own?"

"I know it. It is labour unrewarded till the end. To men like me there is but one future. Ask them to read the boy his future: that matters nothing to any of us."

"Tell us what the boy sees."

The clairvoyante made answer: "He sees a wilderness of chimneys and furnaces; he sees a forest of masts; he sees a multitude of men toiling. There is a roar of steam, the clang of machinery, the din of the mighty hammers, the hissing and bubbling of molten metal; and in the centre, king and



lord of all, he sees—himself. The spirits are smiling on him ; they breathe into his face ; they are filling his brain with great thoughts ; they inspire him with strength and fearlessness. Now his senses leave him ; he falls, but they bear him gently to the ground. The work is done.”

As she spoke, the rosy tinge of the smoke changed again into white ; the clouds that issued from the cressets suddenly diminished, and the smoke itself disappeared, leaving no trace behind it but the heavy smell of some incense which was never burned in churches. The boy was lying, with closed eyes and head resting on his arm, within the triangle where Mr. Bastable had placed him upright. The curtains of the alcove dropped again, and everything was as it had been before.

“Captain Perrymont,” said Mr. Bastable, “to work this miracle of the divining art I have read all books of magic that ever have been written. You have witnessed what no one has seen since the days of the great Paracelsus. He was the last who communicated with the better spirits. I, I alone, possess the secret.”

“Can you teach it to me?”

“Perhaps,” he answered ; “but what is the use? Have you magnetic power? You could not even mesmerise your own son. Have you a clairvoyante to tell you what goes on beneath the magic bell? Have you a child, pure, innocent, and fearless? I have all. I have tried for years to get such a boy. It is by chance alone that I have succeeded ; and how long will he remain innocent? Until the first temptation. When the serpent finds us out, we fall.”

“And what have they told us?”

“Captain Perrymont, I have questioned the other world for thirty years. No direct answer can be got from them for questions such as yours. Knowledge must be sought. In every alchemist’s books you will find that the secrets are to be wrested from Nature itself ; it is the great and universal law. I, too, have tried to get information,”—Mr. Bastable dropped the magician and became again himself. “Once, if you’ll believe me, Captain Perrymont, they gave me the

winner of the Derby, six months before the event, and when he was forty to one I actually never backed my moral—let the time go by. Next year came; one of my patrons, a noble gentleman on the turf, got me to get the information again. Well, sir, I first asked him for a paltry tenner, and then I made him promise me fifty per cent. on all his winnings. You'll hardly credit me, Captain Perrymont, but the spirruts gave me the wrong horse, and my noble backer was let in for a cool thousand. Then he came here and carried on that shameful against the spirruts as you never heard. There was no peace in the house for months afterwards, neither for Mrs. B. nor myself."

"Well, serve you right for trying to make money out of your knowledge. What do you think about your wife's prophecy and the boy's future?"

"There, you see, sir, I don't think anything. She told what she knew. Make no mistake about that! As for the boy, why shouldn't he get on in the world? He's a strong boy, and looks a clever boy. Wait a moment."

He removed the cressets, took up the swords, and placed the boy, still unconscious, upon the sofa.

"Now for the other matter, Captain Perrymont. Where is the map of your estate?"

The Captain gave him a rolled-up plan, which he had been carrying in his hand.

"So . . . The estate is at Esbrough, is it not?"

"Esbrough."

"I know it—I know it. My wife came from—— Never mind. Show me the map."

He spread it flat upon his table, and took from a drawer a small hazel rod about twelve inches long, pierced in the centre with a hole which had been set with an ivory casing. Through this was passed a green silk string.

"This is the divining rod—*la verge de Jacob*—that you first came to see me about, Captain Perrymont. Now, any one can use this that knows its indications as I do; but to use it on the plan of your estate, instead of on the ground itself, requires the aid of my clairvoyante. Some people will tell

you that the hazel rod must be forked, and held by the two hands. Here is one of these elementary things—mere savagery, Captain Perrymont. You may cut one yourself, and prospect your estate to find water, if you like. That is so simple that any gipsy woman will do it for you; what you are going to see now is a different thing altogether.”

He held up his hand, and his wife pushed aside the curtain, and came down from the throne. She had put off the purple robe; but her eyes were still rigid, and she moved with the same painful constraint.

Her husband put the thread in her hand, and placed it in position over the map, so that the rod hung free. The map was about four feet by five, and Mrs. Bastable held the instrument exactly over the centre. At first the rod was motionless; then Mr. Bastable made a few passes before his wife's face, and her fingers held the thread with a tighter grasp.

The rod began to oscillate, and moved round and round, sometimes stopping for a moment, sometimes having one end downwards, but always uncertain.

At every stoppage, Mr. Bastable, who held in his left hand half-a-dozen small glass tubes, applied them rapidly one after the other. Sometimes there was no result; at other times the rod would incline more decidedly, and stand, so to speak, fixed to the spot. Then Mr. Bastable would make a little pencil mark.

At last, and after many experiments, the tube being always changed, the rod seemed to become endowed with a sort of volition, and moved, as if with a purpose, from spot to spot. Finally it inclined vigorously to one corner of the map, and when Mr. Bastable applied his tube, it pointed one end directly to the place, and refused to move again. Then it pulled, or seemed to pull, the hand of its holder in a direction away from the estate, following the tube.

Mr. Bastable changed colour, and held his breath.

“This piece is not coloured as part of your estate, Captain Perrymont.”

“No; it is Holcotes. There are about a hundred acres



of it altogether. This is the worst part. It belongs, I believe, to a man of the name of Bayliss—Paul Bayliss.”

“Bayliss . . . I know him,” Bastable whispered excitedly to himself. “Paul Bayliss . . . Holcotes, near Esbrough . . . That will do.”

He took the rod from his wife’s hand, and replaced it in the drawer.

Then he made another sort of pass, and the rigid look disappeared from his wife’s eyes altogether. She seemed to awake suddenly, and laid her hand upon her head as if in pain.

“Where am I? Ah! . . . I remember. O Benjamin, Benjamin! another wickedness! Oh, dear! oh, dear! and me a Christian woman, and my father the parish clerk!”

“Don’t be a fool, Keziah! Wake up the boy, and take him downstairs. You’ve got the dinner to look after.”

She shook Jack by the shoulder, who awoke at once and sprang to his feet. Without saying a word, she led him, wondering what had happened, down to the kitchen again.

“She remembers nothing, and the boy remembers nothing, Captain Perrymont; it may be that we shall never again succeed in the great function of magic which you have assisted at. We will try again, but I doubt. As for the hazel rod, that is always at your service. By its means I am now able to make a perfect geological map of your estate, which presents some very curious features.”

“I wish it would present some better arable land,” said the Captain. “I would sell it all, if I could.”

“Don’t sell it, Captain,” said Mr Bastable hurriedly. “For heaven’s sake, don’t sell it yet! See now, I will go over to Esbrough, and walk round the estate with you. I cannot do it yet, because I have many experiments to make; but I want to see it very particularly. I do, indeed, and in your interest.”

“Will you make me the map?”

“I will bring it over to Esbrough with me.”

The Captain rose. “It will be best,” he said, “to tell no one of the scene that you and I have witnessed. Here, Mr. Bastable, is the honorarium which I promised you.”

He placed a bank-note in his hand and went away.

"Paul Bayliss!" murmured Mr. Bastable, "Paul Bayliss! The hazel never lies. Now I must think what to do."

Down in the kitchen Jack had resumed his ordinary clothes, and was sitting by the fire, feeling heavy and dazed.

"What did it all mean, Mrs. Bastable?" he asked. "I thought it was what Myles used to call hanky. But I went to sleep somehow. There was a lot of smoke, and I heard somebody talking, and that is all I know about it."

"Don't ask me," she answered. "I don't know, boy; I never do know. I'm all of a shake. Benjamin hasn't done it before not for a year and a half, and I thought he was never going to do it again. It's a wickedness and a tempting, it is. Oh, my poor head! Jack, my dear, lift up the lid and stick the fork in the beef—such a beautiful bit of beef, too, silverside—lovely! and me not able to eat a morsel of it. Oh! what a thing it is to be a clairvoyong!"

Mr. Bastable, you will have discovered before this, was a professor of the magic art. He did not waste his energies over spirit rappings, and *séances* at half-a-crown a head, where vulgar cheats prove the incompleteness of the spiritual education by their bad spelling. Nor did he tell fortunes by cards; nor did he tie himself up in knots and be released by spirits in a dark box; nor did he practise the arts of jugglery. He went in for high art, and boldly attacked the fortress which had been assailed by the great men of old. He read books of magic; he knew the arts of alchemy, astrology, and conjuration. How far, in the scene we have so faithfully described that many will recognise it, the clairvoyante spoke the truth we know not. All that Captain Perrymont saw was the bell-shaped cloud of smoke; all that he heard was from the priestess herself. As we have seen, he heard little to do himself any good.

The science of magic sometimes sleeps—it never dies. A hundred years ago the Parisians were flocking to see the miracles performed by a practician not much higher than Mr. Benjamin Bastable—the Count Cagliostro. A hundred

years before that, the lamp was handed down in secret, and with much trembling, in the south of France and in London. A hundred years before, the magicians and astrologers held as much power in the courts of Europe as ever they did in the courts of Pharaoh and Belshazzar; and now, when we are in the age of reality, and nothing is believed but what is seen, we are on the verge of another outbreak of belief in magic, to which, perhaps, all the preceding shall be mere child's play. In any great city are men like Mr. Bastable, who live poorly because they will not work at their trade, and whose spare time is wholly given up to prying into the secrets of the other world. What the spirits tell them does them no good. What the spirits have taught men in all ages has never done them any good. The oracles are dumb, the sacred cone of Delphi is lost, and yet the art of divining, advising, and foretelling has never died. Still, as before, clairvoyance and mesmerism hold men's minds in thrall; still the world is looking for some new revelation from that dark and mysterious source whence nothing good has ever come; and now, as before, the thing which a generation ago seemed a part and parcel of the dreadful past has sprung once more into life to tease and perplex philosophers as well as fools. The promised fruit lures on the searchers after the unknowable—they are as keen as ever; and, to Captain Perrymont and all his kin, old Chaucer's words on the philosopher's stone might well be addressed this day:—

“Than thus conclude I, syn that God in hevене  
He wol not that the philosophres nevene  
How that a man schall come unto this stone  
I rede as for the beste, let it goon.”

Mr. Bastable presently appeared dressed in the garb of everyday life, and partook of the beef, which was overdone; nor did he make any allusion to the ceremonial they had just gone through.

After dinner he took the boy and gave him some light work in the assaying of metals. It was an uncanny house. Noises went on everywhere, by day and night, at which Mrs. Bastable continuously trembled. When the boy went up and



down the stairs he heard voices, and felt invisible fingers in his hair or on his cheek; any one of the things, indeed, which occurred in that house was enough by itself to make the fortune for ever of an ordinary haunted house. But here they were comparatively unnoticed. The master went about as unmoved as Prospero; the mistress shook and trembled, but expected them; Jack listened and wondered. Whatever the real truth about these manifestations, one thing is quite certain, that Jack preserves to this day a clear and distinct recollection of things for which no intelligible cause can be assigned. Handbells placed on the table rang; pencils moved about on their pointed ends; rappings came from behind the fireplace; tables lifted their straight and foolish legs; laughter and groans came from unexpected quarters when there was, so far as Jack and Mrs. Bastable saw, no one to produce them. The boy listened, and was not afraid. He saw that, somehow or other, the noises were connected with Mr. Bastable's presence in the house, and were regarded by his wife with an ever-increasing terror. Then the noises were manifest to some who came to the house, but not to all. Once the tax-collector, who insisted on waiting till the money was produced, was terrified out of his wits, and rushed frantically from the place. This never happened to the baker or the butcher, who were paid regularly by Mrs. Bastable.

People came to consult Mr. Bastable, who received them in his back room, when Jack waited as page. On these occasions there was a good deal of rapping, and the spirits were called for with a persistence which sometimes drove them into a rage. And noticing that, whatever was done, nobody was hurt, Jack grew familiar with "manifestations" of all kinds, and regarded them with contempt. As regards his work, he learned the elementary experiments in metals which teach the distinction between iron ore and lead, tin and silver.

As for Mrs. Bastable, she spent her time chiefly in lamenting her lot. Jack, she often said, was the only creature in the world who was any comfort to her; but, as her conversation was wholly confined to relating the sorrows of a

clairvoyante and her separation from the common lot of humanity, she was not cheerful company.

People pointed at the house, and made disparaging remarks, too, on the sanity and honesty of its residents, which annoyed Jack when he took his walks abroad. It was not pleasant to have the finger of admiration or scorn pointed at you as the magician's boy or the conjuror's devil; nor is it nice when you are walking with a lady to hear the crowd begin to hoot and cry out at that lady as a witch.

Jack spent two months in this abode of the dead, this last lingering fane of the supernatural. His connection with the Bastables was rudely severed by Myles Cuolahan. For the honest pedlar happened to call at the house while a clairvoyante exhibition was proceeding. The lady, in her curtained alcove, sat upon the velvet throne staring before her with rigid eyes. Prospero, or rather Mr. Bastable, armed with a wand, made all sorts of passes in front of her. Jack, dressed in Syrian garb, swung a censer before the magician, evidently considering the whole exhibition as one eminently calculated to amuse and instruct the three gentlemen who were paying for it. Myles took in the whole proceedings at a glance; seized the boy by the arm, dragged him off to his bedroom, changed his dress, and bore him back in triumph to the astonished Mr. Bastable.

"Gentleman all," he said, "'tis only little Jack, and not a haythan pagan, though he was dressed up in green and gold. Misther Bastable, ye'll find another boy, av ye plase, to do yer conjurin' tricks—conjurin' indeed! betther conjurin' I've seen at Pettigo Fair. Can ye swaller a red-hot poker, tell me that? Can ye pass a shillin' out of yer own pocket into mine, tell me that? Can ye lick up a plateful o' fire without so much as winkin', tell me that? Spirits, is it?—what is it, at all, that they do for ye? Come, Jack, we'll be going. The next time ye want a boy, spick and span new, Bastable, bid him come to me for a charackter, and it's a fine one as we'll give ye. And as for ye"—he turned upon the unhappy three who were about to pay a five-pound note for a spiritual manifestation of a superior order, and now stood aghast at

the unexpected turn—"as for ye, ye three poor misguided fools, go home wid ye. Tell yer wives that ye are not to be trusted out alone; and say yer prayers to be forgiven for the wicked tempting of Providence. Bastable, I'll take Jack, and I forgive ye."

## CHAPTER VII.

"**B**UT what am I to do with you, Jack?" asked Myles, as they left the oracular dwelling of the Bastables. "What am I to do with you at all?"

"I'll go with you, Myles."

Myles looked at the little figure before him critically. He was a sturdy boy, full of life, vigour, and strength; not a delicately pretty boy, with his rough, firm features, but a boy whom mothers of delicately pretty children might sigh to look upon. Everything about him denoted strength, from the curly brown locks, the clear blue eyes, the square forehead, the clean-cut nostril, the projecting chin, down to his sturdy legs. A boy like his border ancestor of the strong arm. Some boys dance when they walk; the passing moments play them a kind of waltz, to which their feet go ever tripping in cadence; these are the imaginative boys; out of such stuff are made poets, artists, preachers, enthusiasts. Some boys slouch, and of such are made, if they are well born, sensualists of the lower order, and if their cradle be the gutter, habitual criminals. Some boys walk ever gravely at the same pace, never quickening at the agitation of a pulse, never slackening at a disturbing thought: these boys are the successful ones in life, they follow the beaten track, are never tempted aside from the line of duty, dutifully swim in the current of the world; they get money, they have children at their desire, their eyes swell out with fatness, and they go to heaven. Other boys there are whose step is a sort of triumphal march; they dream great things, of what kind they know not yet; and as they go their feet move in a rhythmic beat to the grand orchestral procession in their



minds. Such boys as these are perhaps the happiest of all, for if they succeed they win great names and power as well as fortune; and if they fail, as needs must oftenest happen, they fall gloriously in the great battle of life. Jack was one of these, his mind as yet full of grand confidence, and the world teeming with all kinds of glorious possibilities. He knew nothing except to read and write, and to discern the ores. He had no book learning at all; did not know whether the world was round or square; absolutely could not tell you whether England—I think he had never heard the name of England—was an island or a continent; had not yet, even, though it seems incredible, learned the names of the kings of Judah; so that what the boy had for the basis of his dreams the Lord only knows.

If you watch a baby asleep you will see the ridiculous little animal every now and then smile in unconscious appreciation of some dream-told joke, some unexpected combination of events, some hilarious recollection, which must have been produced out of the events of his short life. So with Jack. In the squalor and misery of his past life there had been nothing, absolutely nothing, to furnish him with hopes or ambitions. All was mean, pitiful, and degrading; and yet here he was, at ten years old, with the audacity of a young Prince of Wales, looking forward to a future which was all, in some undefined way, to be spent in realms of splendour and joy. In Jack's mind, splendour and joy meant work, and the only form of work with which he was acquainted was the assaying of metals and the analysis of compounds.

"Go with me, Jack?" said Myles.

"I've been with you before, you know, Myles."

"And then I had to carry you most of the way, Jack. But it's four years ago, and you've grown since then."

"Carry me!" Jack blushed with shame. "Why, Myles, do you think— But tell me, Myles, you would like me with you on the road, wouldn't you? We could talk about Norah, you know; and I could carry the pack when you were tired—and—and—you know, Myles, if you felt inclined to break the pledge, you could tell me, and I'd prevent you."

Myles laughed.

"Break the pledge, is it? Niver a fear, lad. Bedad! barrin' a weakness in the legs when I pass a house, which is force of habit, maybe, I never feel desire for dhrink. Ah, boy! if I'd known before what a good dhrink ginger-beer is, and how much better you get along with coffee, I'd be a rich man this day. But you shall go with me, Jack, and—don't laugh, Jack—I've been reshuming my education at the point where I left it thirty years ago. That was when Misther M'Brearty turned me out of his academy at Belfast. He was a Connaught man, ye know, and a great friend of my father's, bein' almost of as ancient a family. And he used to hang up legs of mutton in the chimney to smoke, and when he was hungry, which was pretty well always, for he had a devil of a twist on him, he would cut off a collop, put it in the frying-pan, and eat it whilst he went on wi' the studies. He was an illigant scholar, John M'Brearty; but one day he went out on important business with my father, nothin' short of swearing an alibi for an illicit distiller, and left the school in charge of me and Mike Feargus, one of the poor scholars that used to go up and down Ireland. 'Myles,' says Mike, 'I'm mortal hungry,' looking at the collops. 'Is there time?' says I. 'Lashins,' says he. With that he whips down a leg of mutton, and in a minute the collops was on the fire. Would you believe the bad luck? Before we'd well finished the first frying-pan full, and were beginning the second, who should come in but the masther and my father! The masther took Mike, and my father took me.

"'My collops, ye young divil!' cries M'Brearty, with the sthrap in his hand over Mike. 'Collops o' mutton!' cries my father, with his big stick over me. 'If it hadn't been Friday I shouldn't have minded, ye black murderin Prodesdan.'" And then my education finished, for I left school the same day, and my father and all, and a black Prodesdan I've been ever since. A quare religious conversion, wasn't it, Jack? But my father was a *votedheen*, what the Scotch call *unco guid*."

"And what have you got in your hand, Myles?" asked Jack, impatient at this long story.

"It's a joggrephy book, Jack, and we'll go through it together when we've got a quiet evening to ourselves. Joggrephy and history, the bookseller said it was. Maybe it will throw a light on the dirty Saxons in Ireland. We'll start to-morrow, if it's fine."

Jack's preparations were easily made, and consisted entirely, having exchanged his green page's suit, in getting together such rougher and stronger garments as might be better fitted for road work, Myles himself superintending his outfit with great care. The finishing stroke was completed by taking off the boy's white collar and wrapping a common red handkerchief round his throat. More depends upon the presence of a collar than would be generally supposed, and I think, respectable reader, you would be surprised at the change in your personal appearance which you may effect by the simple process of tying up your neck with a common red wrapper. However, it mattered little for Jack. He was tired of one life, and was going to begin another. Back to that old life on the road, of which he had the faint recollections that cling about the age of four and five. He could remember being carried in Myles's arms. He could remember the wood fire by the roadside, the camp of gipsies, the cart hung round with brooms and brushes, all sorts of little things. Myles's regular beat was about Yorkshire, with occasional visits to certain towns in the more northern counties. Once a year, for instance, but not oftener, he proposed to visit Bedesbury, and see how his little girl was getting on. Once a week, since his reform left him regularly with money to spare, he sent off his earnings, without keeping account, to Miss Ferens. And it was on this beat that he now intended, for a time, at least, to take little Jack about with him. What to do with him afterwards, what was to become of the boy eventually, of course never entered into honest Myles's head to consider.

He carried the pack in a box slung on to his back. It was filled with all sorts of light things likely to be wanted at the farms and cottages. There were pins, needles, tape, ribbon, string, scissors, thimbles, thread, silk, worsted, white twist,



and more besides, all in a flat, square box that lay across the hawker's shoulders, and, by long practice in carrying, caused him no inconvenience at all. In his hand he carried a stout stick. A pipe was stuck in his felt hat; and if you had examined the inside of his coat, you would have found it filled with pockets, some of them buttoned up containing money, and some occupied with the small articles of toilet and personal luggage which Mr. Cuolahan—a man of simple habits—considered indispensable. All Jack's luggage was a little knapsack, picked up a great bargain by Myles, and strapped empty to his back. "The common tramps, Jack," said his patron, "carry all their traps in a red handkerchief. We are respectable hawkers; so you fix up the knapsack."

They started next day at six. The day was fine—one of those clear, cool days in July, when the wind, in the shade, makes you think that summer is hardly yet arrived. They had their breakfast—coffee and bread-and-butter—and were out of the town and well among the fields before the lazy maids had opened the shutters and taken in the milk. Jack walked soberly enough while they were within the streets; but once outside and in the country lanes—for Myles did not affect highroads—he ran and danced about like some little puppy beside its master.

Myles's trade was chiefly in the cottages. He knew everybody on his road, especially the wives and daughters, and was in great esteem among the ladies, as one who never went to a public-house and saved his money. Thus he acted either as an example or a scarecrow. The affability with which he would sit down, tell a story, drink a glass of milk, and even, as frequently happened, bestow a fatherly kiss upon any of the girls that might be comely, had a good deal to do with his popularity. And then another thing helped: Myles was honest. If people bought a reel of cotton marked fifty yards, there was no need to measure it, because—you see it was twenty years ago—Myles did not cheat, and the manufacturers then were honest. Now, nothing pays so well as honesty if you are in trade. If you are not, perhaps honesty is not so necessary. Considering, then, that Myles had to

visit every cottage, to talk to every old woman, to open his pack at least, and to introduce little Jack, it is not surprising that his rate of progress should be slow; and after giving time for all these occupations, and for having dinner and tea on the road—neither of them banquets of great luxury—the first day's work, enough for Jack, consisted of some twelve miles in all.

The day's journey brought them to the manufacturing town of Daylesford. Cuolahan led the way, the boy dragging tired limbs after him, to a tavern which stood in a by-street. Outside it was a quiet, dingy-looking place, with nothing to mark it but a signpost swinging from the wall. Inside, those who knew it were wont to say that it was the resort of all the devils in Yorkshire. Thither resorted the better class of tramps, those who unite the doubtful callings of beggar and impostor, ladies and gentlemen who have mostly at different times made acquaintance with the inside of the country's gaols. It must be recorded, perhaps to the disadvantage of Myles, that though the very paragon of rectitude himself, he regarded the departure from virtue in others as an unfortunate accident due to circumstances, rather than as a thing in itself to cause any rupture of friendly relations with the victim. In other words, Myles Cuolahan had been, for twenty years and more, out of a life of forty years, a wanderer and a tramp. His lines of life had thrown him among other wanderers and tramps not so honest as himself; and he had learned to regard the habitual criminal as a gentleman who made his living by ways which he did not follow, mainly because he had never had any occasion to desert his own. Some people are honest because they get on in the world. It never does to inquire too closely into motives, but perhaps Myles was one of these; for the licensed hawker makes good earnings, and Myles had very early in life found out the secret that it is best to give people their money's worth.

The landlord was behind the bar, a short, thick-set man, with a stubbly beard and a fat spotty face, smoking the short pipe that never left his lips except when he was sleeping or

eating. He wore rings on his bloated fingers, had a big gold breastpin, a huge watch-chain, and looked what he was—an unscrupulous, greedy, sensual creature, with just pluck enough to carry out the plans that his narrow and crafty mind suggested. He grinned a welcome.

"Myles Cuolahan! It is a year and more since you came here last. What will you drink? Oh! I forgot. Well, here's a bottle of ginger-beer. And who have you got with you?"

"We'll have the best room, Misther Coger, the double-bedded room, and no one else in it. This boy is Jack Armstrong—my boy, you know, that I told you of. He's tired now, poor chap, and we'll have a cup of tea and a chop for supper. Who is in the house to-night?"

"You may well ask who," said Mr. Coger. "I don't suppose there's been such a houseful since I opened this bar. Why, to begin with, there's Captain Cardiff himself, drinking sherry wine by the pint, and smoking cigars at fourpence. None of your yards of clay and twopenny smokes with gin-and-water for the Captain."

"No!" said Myles, slapping his leg. "Cardiff Jack! Why, the last I heard of him he was in Millbank for that little affair you know of"—

"Ay, ay," returned the landlord. "Best say nothing about Millbank to Mr. Cardiff; he wants that forgotten. Then there's General Duckett."

"What's the General doing here?" asked Myles. "I thought he and his boys were always down in Kent."

"So they are . . . so they are. But I think he is looking out for more boys. Ah, Myles! if you'd only think of it, what a lovely bonnet that child of yours would make!"

Myles put a protecting hand on little Jack, who had taken advantage of the conversation to fall fast asleep on a settle. "No, no, Coger. You know me. Jack and me are on another lay. General Duckett! General Duckett! Why, he must be nigh eighty years of age."

"Eighty if he's a day; and as fresh and spry as most men of sixty. But there's lots more behind. There's Shallow



Bob, the turnpike sailor; there's Liverpool Joe, the quack; there's the fellow with the queer name—what is it?—the foreign chap, with his patter and his religion. We never were so lively before. You don't drink as you used, Myles; and I'm sorry for you, because they will have their joke."

"All right, Cogger, all right. We'll have a jolly evening, though I am a teetotaler. Send us in the chops, will you? Wake up, Jack, my boy. You shall have your supper and go to bed presently."

He woke up the boy, and they passed on into the inner room.

## CHAPTER VIII.

A FORMER proprietor had constructed at the back of the house a long and tolerably lofty room, designed—for it was before the invention of music-halls—for a free-and-easy or harmonic-meeting room, one of those delightful retreats which still flourish in country places, combining all the actual evils of the music-hall with none of those undeveloped possibilities which the latter possesses for the improvement of popular taste. The first builder and original owner of this temple speedily found himself so far deceived by the smiles of Hope, that one night, after carefully emptying the contents of the till, disposing of his spirits to private friends, and entertaining a select circle with a farewell symposium, at which all that was left of the beer was consumed, he was fain to "shoot the moon," and was no more seen. His successor for a time maintained the free-and-easy, and then, the place becoming under his benignant rule more and more a chosen house-of-call for tramps, he reserved it for them as a saloon or withdrawing-room, where they might spend their evenings in the mutual exchange of ideas, in intellectual conversation, or in the cultivation, by means of the higher classical music, of their æsthetic faculties. It also served as a kitchen for the preparation of supper. There were two fireplaces, one at each end of the long room.

The evening was warm, and only the supper fire was

burning when Myles and Jack entered. The windows were closed; the smoke of sausages, bloaters, and chops, with that of twenty or thirty pipes, and the fragrant memories of many thousands of such evenings as this, imparted to the room a smell which was like a London fog, inasmuch as it was so thick as to be almost visible—a smell which might have been savoury in the nostrils of a Homeric god—a smell which a chemist might study with curiosity—a smell which could never be forgotten. The science of smells is yet in its infancy. They have not been even classified, yet some rude classification is possible to the most shallow thinker. There is an acrid, penetrating smell, such as I once experienced in visiting Greenwich Hospital Chapel on a Sunday in summer, just after service. It haunts one for weeks. That particular smell—which was a chemical compound of boy, beadle, and corduroy, and, although a compound, was one and indivisible, with an individuality of its own—haunted me for months. There is, next, a keen and sharp smell which runs you through like the point of a bayonet, and makes you yell and suddenly drop. This you may get in a hospital. There is a smell which is like the blow of a hammer, and knocks the sense out of you. It may be found in the fore-castle of a ship anywhere about the region of the Doldrums or in the Red Sea. There is the smell of a poultry shop, the smell of vinegar, the smell of niggerdom, the smell of burning paper; but all these smells are like mignonette, heliotrope, otto of roses, wood violet, lily of the valley, blackberry jam, or the perfume that rises from your Lesbia's tresses, compared with the turbid mixture of all vile smells which floated about the atmosphere of this room, and gave it a character peculiar to itself. You remembered the place, not by the fat cook who, with bare arms and ruddy cheeks, stood over frying-pan and gridiron, tossing from time to time, fish, flesh, or sausage, as it was done, into three dishes that stood before her. You might forget the cook. You might even forget the little crowd that was congregated round her waiting their turn—boys and men, women and girls. They were tramps; they belonged to the population which is called floating; they

were the dregs and refuse of the English-speaking race; they were a mixture of gipsy, pedlar, and Irish vagrants. They sat, or stood, or leaned against the wall, without much talk, waiting to be fed, the eyes of each fixed steadily upon his own portion. As it emerged from the frying-pan, each in turn laid hasty hands upon it, and devoured it at the great table that stood handy for the purpose. Scant grace was theirs, small the preparations for the meal, and weak the response of a thankful heart when all was finished to the last crumb, and still an unfortunate stomach craved for more. It might be possible to forget the lack-lustre faces, the weary looks, the soulless eyes of that little group of English-born savages. There was nothing horrible about them, nothing comic, nothing cheerful, nothing attractive. Among them there was one face, and only one, on which the eye would rest with pleasure. It was the face of a young girl of seventeen. She leaned against the table, and fixed her eyes hungrily upon a gaunt and pinched-up bloater on the gridiron, her supper. Her eyes! O painters of the ideal—painters of the sweet woman's face! look into the depths of those eyes, and transfer to the canvas, if you can, the limpid eternity of thought, feeling, passion, and hope apparent in that gaze! So live for ever. Her mouth is a very rosebud of a mouth; lips half parted and open show pearl-white teeth. Her features are cut clean and straight; her hair is thick and abundant. She wears it tied in a careless grace about her head. She is a goddess, whose every movement is a grace, and every thought a step heavenward. And, alas! it is all a lie to look at! There are no thoughts in that head with the sweet and gracious curves, save thoughts that are bad and detestable. Those eyes, which were designed for a Sappho, belong to the commonest and most hopeless tramp. Her rosebud mouth is the passage of coarse words and rough execrations; her features are yet delicate, because she is so young, and they have not had time to grow thick with drink and debauchery. And yet the pity of it—oh! the pity of it. It seems, somehow, so natural, that a thick-lipped, low-browed, coarse-featured



creature should be a criminal and a drunkard, that we have no pity for him. It is only because by a wholesome instinct we associate goodness with beauty that we pity the tender and lovely girl standing yet, to appearance, on the brink of infamy, though in reality she has been steeped in it since the first day that she could understand what went on in the world around her. Turn from the pretty creature and forget her. You had best, because you cannot help her. Look at her companion, Shallow Bob by name. He has been a pretended sailor, with a lying story of shipwreck and disaster, and is now, like Myles Cuolahan, a pedlar and hawker. But, unlike his friendly rival, he is an ardent votary of Bacchus. That is the reason why his young wife has only a single red-herring for her supper, and why Bob himself is asleep on the settle, with no supper at all but a skinful of beer. Bob, you see, is drunk. You might, I say again, forget the occupants of the room, its shape, its appearance, its situation. What you never could forget, if you had once experienced it, was the smell.

Myles knew it of old, and took no notice of it as he walked to the further end, followed by Jack. Here, where the empty fireplace formed a natural centre, sat in a semicircle half a dozen gentlemen whose well-dressed appearance, as well as a certain haughtiness of carriage, proclaimed their superiority to the noisy troop at the other end. They were accommodated partly with settles and partly with wooden chairs, which bore signs of having seen rough usage. In the largest and most comfortable chair, the arms of which were yet unbroken, sat a man of apparently fifty years of age. His legs were crossed, and in one hand he nursed a pint pot containing what Mr. Coger confidently called sherry wine. He was drinking it, rather ostentatiously, like beer. A cigar graced his lips, which were thin, shifty, and subject to nervous twitchings. His shaven cheek was pale; his features were straight, regular, and even handsome; the crow's-feet, carved like some delicate chasing, lay thickly about the corners of his eyes; and these were quick, keen, and cruel. He was of middle height and thin; dressed in a suit of black, with a

white neckcloth that might have served the most unpromising of Baptist ministers; and his hands, white and shapely, were furnished with fingers as slender and tapering as those of any girl. This gentleman's name, among his intimates, was Cardiff Jack, and he was so called, like a mediæval warrior, after the supposed place of his birth. Among those who only aspired to the honour of a partial acquaintance with him, it was Mr. Cardiff or Captain Cardiff. And it was significant of the greatness of his merits that the lower any lady or gentleman was sunk into the slough of habitual criminalism, the more she or he honoured and respected Captain Cardiff. Mr. Cardiff? Why, the man lived like a nobleman, eating and drinking the best. What the flesh craved for, Mr. Cardiff could give the flesh. He slept in feather-beds every night; he knew no casual wards; the hard labour of the treadmill had only occasionally been his lot during a run of at least twenty years; and there seemed no end or limit to the prosperity which attended all his ventures. So when Antonio borrowed that money of the Jew, his keels floated safely in the harbours or sailed merrily before the wind. Fine weather may change. No man was ever safe from the strokes of fortune until they invented the three-percents; and even with these we may have to travel by railway, and so miserably perish; or we may have to sleep in a friend's house, and catch typhus from a drain; or we may have supper at a ball, and die the next day from the quassia which was in the beer, the sour gooseberry in the glass before the last sara-band, or the fusel oil in the stirrup-cup. Mr. Cardiff, who spent his money as he got it, had not yet advanced to the three-percents, and so was exposed to every breeze of Fortune the mutable.

Opposite to him sat, side by side on the settle, two gentlemen, one of advanced years, who were beaming upon each other with a benignity that spoke of mutual affection and trust, with that long separation from each other that is requisite—such is our fallen humanity—for the maintenance of perfect trust among friends. One, who “enjoyed the title,” as the Peerage says, of General—General Duckett, indeed—

was a white-haired man, whose long flowing locks, coupled with a white beard, a pair of red eyes, a nose very much like those bottle-noses which any one over thirty can just remember—they have entirely disappeared now—and two thick, protruding lips, gave a combination of expressions very remarkable. Looked at in profile, he appeared benevolent, soft-hearted, gentle, though undoubtedly plain. Looked at from a three-quarter face point of view, the nose, being foreshortened, lost, somehow, its benevolence, and you got the effect of both eyes. Then you began to think there might be another side of the character to this good old man. Seen full-face, with both those orbs upon you in all their Mars-like redness, their steady fervour, you wondered if all virtue had left the world, since the mere turning of a face could make you feel cold and doubtful of its very existence. As for his companion, he was dressed in the garb of the lusty Turk. A vast turban was wrapped round his head, the corners of which hung down in graceful plaits; his face covered with an immense black beard, was of a deep chocolate brown, as were also his hands. A Syrian jacket, of embroidered scarlet cloth, was over a loose shirt or waistcoat of purple cloth, and the dress terminated in flowing Oriental trousers, falling in folds about his heels. He wore English boots. In his belt was stuck a dagger-knife, a brass inkhorn such as Syrians wear, and out of his pocket protruded the end of a voluminous roll.

Myles looked at him with surprise. He knew the other two, and nodded familiarly as he entered; but the third man he did not know. They all three roared with laughing. Myles, with no further ceremony, took the immense beard in his hand, and, to Jack's enormous surprise, removed it bodily. The face which it revealed was, like the part exposed, of a deep brown; and Myles knew it now, and gave back the beard to the owner with a laugh in which the moralist would have missed the reproof that should have fallen.

"It's only Tom Lock," he said.

"Yussuf Ben Ibn Hassan Effendi, if you please," said Mr. Lock, putting back the beard very carefully. "Wallah! A



poor Arabian Jew, persecuted for his faith, and now wandered to the shores of England, where alone he can hope to receive help from the charitable."

"He talks English too well," said Captain Cardiff.

"Yussuf is poor; Yussuf is pious. The rabbis have chased Yussuf from the synagogue. From earliest childhood Yussuf has studied English with the good missionaries. He knows it better than Arabic."

"A good deal better," said Mr. Cardiff.

"Bismillah! May I show your gracious excellency my copy of the Hebrew Scriptures? Behold it!"

"Tom Lock, you are going it too strong," observed Myles.

"Not at all. I've been to the Levant; I knocked about among them for half a dozen years. I know all their little dodges, and I twig their lingo—at least, enough of it. The hind wheel of a carriage will pass where the fore wheel has passed. That's a Turkish proverb. Wallah!"

"Better do a day's work, Tom," said Myles the Moral.

"Another Turkish proverb: To the lazy man every day is a holiday. Wallah!"

"And what are you doing up here, General?"

"I'm here for the good of my health, Mr. Cuolahan. There was a little unpleasantness about me and two or three of my dear, dear children; and they kept me a year and more in Maidstone while they looked into it. Was so pressing that I couldn't get away. Now I have got away, they have kept the kids, poor things, and I want one or two more. Them Reformatories cuts me up dreadful."

He fixed his unholy eyes on Jack, who looked uneasily at Myles.

"No, no, General!" he said good-naturedly; "you don't get that boy. Your Kentish Brigade must break up altogether if it can't get on without my Jack."

"Don't think, Mr. Cuolahan," said the Commander of the Brigade with pride—"do not think that I have to beg my boys of any one. Parents who know what's good for their children bring them to me, sir, I would have you to know, to be taught the profession and made rich men of."

The profession was the art of robbery in all its branches, the General being one of those enthusiasts who, without actually being in practice, devote their talents to "coaching" and instructing aspirants. In every branch of learning, in every mystery, there are such men. The Civil Service, the Army, the Church, have every avenue crowded with those whom, if the competitive system people were logical, they would invite to the highest places, because they know most. The General had only lately, as he hinted to Myles, quitted Maidstone prison, where he had spent a twelvemonth in durance for receiving stolen goods, and was now in the North for the benefit of his health.

"I found Maidstone," he said, taking a sip at the rum and water, "pleasant for a change; but I got tired of it. At my time of life the doctor, you see, always orders a ration of wine or spirits every day, so that I didn't altogether go without my whack, and there was no hard labour for me. As for the tobacco—well, after all, it does not matter much. You do get lonely sometimes at night, and away from the dear boys and all; but, Lord, regular hours is very good for an old man. And then you can reflect, as the chaplain said."

"The fish comes to his senses after he is in the net. Turkish proverb—Wallah!" said Yussuf Ibn Hassan Effendi.

"The Bible to read—well—well—there's good stories in the Bible, when you come to read them with understanding. Did you ever hear the story of Samson, Cardiff Jack?"

"Hang Samson"——

"No; don't swear at Samson—don't; because you might be sorry for it afterwards. And it's a good story. There was the makings of a very successful man about Samson, if only he'd had the advantages of my education. When Samson lost his bet, Cardiff—it was a rum bet, thirty sheets and thirty changes of garments—I suppose they must have been in the slop trade, and it really seems a good deal: wuth—ah! if the garments wasn't only a little gone, they might be wuth a matter of five pound, take them in the lump."

"Well, General, get on—get on. Samson lost his bets, and then he stepped it, I suppose. You don't call *that* a dodge?"

"Now, there's your error, Cardiff. That's what the common practitioner would have done. Any mean thief could step it. Do you hear, boys and girls?" He raised his voice, and addressed himself to the other end of the room. "Anybody could step it. What did Samson do?" He looked round and whispered. "Well, when you read the story you'll see what Samson did when he lost. But he paid up all his bets like a gentleman, and nobody never suspected how he done it, so artful he done it."

After delivering himself of this proof of the advantages of prison discipline and Biblical study, the General fell back in his settle.

"Yes, I'd a very peaceful and quiet twelvemonths at Maidstone. It was a pleasure to gammon the chaplain—he was that soft—and the people was most civil and attentive—nobody more so. You see, they all knows General Duckett, the head of the Kentish Brigade. 'General,' said one of the warders, 'it does a man's 'art good to see you back here again in the old place. Eighty years of age, and half of 'em spent in quod, and quite the gentleman still. I calls you, General, a credit to the country.' It's very flatterin', that kind of thing, Myles, and friends all; and I do hope"—his voice grew a little tremulous—"that when you are as old as me, you will have the same respect used, and find the same good feeling, in whatever jug you gets to. The worst of it was the disorder the Brigade fell into. Mostly broken up and scattered—my dear boys. Some of them promising lads, too."

He turned to his friend the Oriental on his right, and began to smile upon him.

"My own boy," he murmured, waving his hand at Yussuf Ibn Hassan; "my boy—I made him what he is."

"Who is the kid, Myles?" asked Mr. Cardiff.

Myles explained briefly that Jack was his pal, disdaining any statement of the circumstances that had led to their connection.

"He seems a nice boy," said the other, looking at him much as General Duckett had done.



"Yes, Jack's a good boy. What's more," continued Myles, "he's going to be a good boy, Jack Cardiff."

"Ay, ay! so I suppose. Well, good boys are scarce. I never was a good boy, for my own part."

The noise of plates and chattering at the other end of the room had by this time subsided, most of the people having taken their supper and gone off to bed or to somewhere else. Only the unfortunate Bob was left, still sleeping off the effects of the beer, and with him the girl, sitting at his side with feminine patience, waiting till her lord should waken. So sat Jael the Kenite, till the thought came into her head to get that hammer and the nail and finish off her guest at one blow.

"I never was a good boy," Mr. Cardiff repeated, looking round and seeing that they were alone. "I was a bad boy from the beginning."

Myles looked at him in amazement. Was Cardiff Jack, after all, going to repent his ways?

"I was a gentleman, Myles, though you wouldn't think it now."

"Why not?" asked Myles persuasively. "Shure the coat you wear"—

"The coat, man!" returned the other impatiently. "I was just such another boy to look at as that little devil there. The same curly hair—and—what does it matter, eh?"

He finished his pint of sherry at a single draught, and laughed.

"I once read in a book that there is sure to be a scapegrace in every family. As, you see, I was very fond of all my brothers and sisters, and most careful of the family honour, I was anxious to avert this calamity from the rest of them by any means possible. After a good deal of thought, I hit upon the only plan which seemed to me quite sure of success. I resolved upon becoming the family scapegrace myself. I was expelled from school. I went to an army coach, and was expelled by him, though *he* needn't have been so nasty particular; and then I got my commission. By Gad! Myles, I've had the Queen's commission, and worn the scarlet. Somehow I didn't get time to sow the wild oats before I was

exp—— I mean I had to resign my commission. And then my family would do no more for me. Fancy, Myles, after all my sacrifices for their sake; after becoming the bad hat of the whole lot, setting the awful example for them to avoid, my brothers and sisters declined to do anything for me! My father cut me out of his will, and so I became—what you know me—Jack Cardiff, the begging-letter writer.”

“More’s the pity,” said Myles, “when you might have got your license and hawked a respectable swag about a good beat.”

“Trade,” said the other—“trade, Myles; all very well for you who know no better, but I could not degrade myself and my belongings by taking up trade.”

“It is degrading,” remarked Myles, “to get an honest living, isn’t it?”

The Arabian Jew opened his mouth to speak.

“Now, don’t you say ‘Wallah,’ Tom Lock,” said Mr. Cardiff, “or I’ll chuck the tumbler at your head. Shut up!”

“There is a Turkish proverb,” returned Yussuf Ibn Hassan, “which says, To hold your tongue is peace. Wallah!”

“It is all he knows” said Mr. Cardiff; “half a dozen Turkish proverbs and a turban. Lord! Lord! what fools some people be!”

“I’m working my way to Bath, where there’s a dear old maiden lady, a vessel very precious to all good Christian people, who takes an interest in Arabian Jews, especially if they’re converts. I’m going to stay with her. Let’s see, Mr. Cardiff, whether your twenty tricks are going to be better than my one.”

Here little Jack, who had been nodding for some time, fairly fell off the settle, and came with a bump on the ground.

“Come, Jack,” cried Myles, “we’ll go to bed,” and carried him off.

“’Tis the first day he came with me,” he said, looking at the innocent boy gone fast asleep the moment he lay down in bed. “The first day, and I bring him here, of all places in the world! Why, Lord forgive us! if I let him stay here

for a week, General Duckett would have him in his Kentish Brigade, stealing pewter pots from the public-houses, and towels from the hedges. And Tom Lock would dress him up like an Arabian Jew, and take him off to Bath to lie and steal from the old fool there. And Cardiff Jack would make him his bonnet to help *him* to lie and steal. Myles, ye must be a hardened sinner yerself, you and your temperance pledge and all, to bring the child to a house like this. Never again, Jack, never again, We'll sleep in the barns and under the hedges if we can't get into decent public's ; never again."

And then Myles, taking the precaution to put the chair against the lock of the door and to tie his purse round his waist, got into bed himself and fell asleep.

Next morning he awoke at seven. Jack, his face upon his arm, was still sleeping soundly. Myles dressed noiselessly, and taking his pack, descended the stairs. He left word at the bar that the boy was to be undisturbed till he returned, drank his coffee, and went out.

Between nine and ten Jack too awoke, wondering where he was. Finding Myles gone, he dressed quickly and went downstairs. In the bar was Mr. Cardiff, perusing a paper he had just finished writing. General Duckett was there, too, taking his "morning." He held the doctrine that it mattered little how much you drank, provided you took it on a full stomach, and at regular stated hours. Acting on this theory, he breakfasted regularly at eight, and "took" something once every hour, and in the evening twice, for the rest of the day. At a certain hour his pulse began to quicken. Later on, his energies and imagination were in full play. Quite late, and just before he went to bed, his legs began to tie themselves in knots, and his speech grew thick. We left him last night just before this stage was reached. The Arabian Israelite was already gone, not by the road, but by public conveyance—a third-class railway carriage—to a certain village he knew of, on the way to Bath, where there was a learned clergyman who took great interest in the conversion of Jews.

The rest of the company had all dispersed.



"Hallo! here's Myles's boy," cried Cardiff Jack. "Hanged if he hasn't turned up on purpose. Where's Myles, my chap?"

"Mr. Cuolahan's gone into the town," said the barman, "with his swag. And the boy's to have a cup o' coffee, and as much bread-and-butter as he can eat, and an egg. And he's to wait here till Myles comes home."

"What was I a-saying of?" drivelled the General, now in the first or awakening stage of his daily faculties. "What was I agoing to say?"

Mr. Cardiff was regarding little Jack with a reflective air.

"I know what I was agoing to say. Cardiff Jack, when I was in Portland"—

"Oh! d—n Portland!"

"When I was in Portland—I didn't like it at all. Maidstone is quite a pleasant jug, and they sing beautiful hymns in the chapel of a Sunday; but when I was in Portland, working in the hospital, I made the acquaintance of a very pleasant gentleman—a very pleasant gentleman indeed he was. I dare say you've heard tell of him, Cardiff; he's Mr. Inspector Mahaffy, the detective."

Cardiff caught little Jack by the arm and hurried him out of the place, leaving a parting execration for the General.

"Now, that's unkind of Cardiff Jack," murmured the good old man, "because I could have told him, if he'd only waited two minutes for me to collect my thoughts, that Mr. Inspector Mahaffy is in this very identical town. I saw him yesterday. And he's up to no good, though he is a affable sort."

"Did he say owt to ye?" asked the potboy.

"We exchanged the compliments of the season," replied the General grandly; "but I don't want Mr. Mahaffy asking questions, and so I'm off by the first train that goes. And if I was Cardiff Jack I'd be off too. Ah! if I could only get that purty boy, that purty, curly, mealy-faced, up-and-down little fat-legged cherubim of a boy, with a face like a angel for sweetness, there would be no brighter ornament for poor old General Duckett on all the road—no, nor a smarter lad in the Kentish Brigade. But it can't be—it can't be—and I must do without him."

He sighed, and took another glass of the reviver.

Outside, the wary Cardiff drew the boy gently round the corner, where there was a sort of blind alley and a stable. He sat down on the shafts of a cart, and put the child in front of him.

"Let me look at you, boy—straight in the face—so. Let me look at your hands. Good—white and soft. Do you see this letter? Good again. Now, you've just got to do exactly what I tell you, no more and no less. There was a boy once did more than I told him. I cut him to pieces. D'ye hear?—I cut him to pieces."

The man's eyes, as he hissed out his words in a fierce whisper, were as fierce as any wild cat's. Jack looked up and down for Myles, but he was away up-town with his pack, buying and selling.

"Take that letter and read it. You can read?"

Jack read—

"SIR,—I am the correspondent who has requested you to receive intelligence of a startling character. I must first say that you are invited to make any scrutiny possible into my character. I am a gentleman, formerly one of the most intimate friends and acquaintances of your late lamented brother, Captain Charles —— of the —— Regiment. I was with him when, in the year 18—, he made that tour in the United States and Canada from which he never returned. I joined him in Toronto, left him on his marriage in Baltimore, and was with him again at the birth of his son. I am aware that the family supposed him to have perished unmarried at the foundering of the *Royal Prince*. He did die, but he left a son, now a boy, brought up as a gentleman, but in ignorance of his paternity, and quite destitute of any means. He is *now the same age and has much the same appearance* as the youthful bearer of this letter. I am the only person who possesses proofs of the existence of this son, and of the marriage of your brother. The boy is therefore the rightful owner of the lands you now hold. I am, sir, a gentleman, once in the army. Ill-health obliged me to sell out.

Although it is my duty to give you this information, I can feel for those who, in the peaceful enjoyment of an ample estate, have suddenly to contemplate the entire annihilation of their income. Yours was inherited by you in the belief that your brother died childless. But stern necessity obliges me, not only in my own interests, but also in those of my unfortunate ward, to ask some small assistance from your ample means. Secure to me, by any arrangement you may wish to make, the future subsistence of the boy, and you will be unmolested. Deny this, and I proceed to the nearest lawyer's, to place my papers in his hands. After which, of course, the law will decide the matter. You will understand, sir, that you have to do with a gentleman who, out of regard to the memory of his dead and gallant friend, wishes to smooth matters over.

I remain, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

“CLAUDE HAMILTON PRENDERGAST,

“Captain.

“*P.S.*—I can give you one hour for consideration. The bearer will bring back with him, solely as a guarantee of good faith, the small advance of five pounds.”

Jack read it—it was written in a most beautiful and clerkly hand—spelling out the hard words with great care, and understanding nothing at all about it.

“Now, boy, Myles Cuolahan left a message for you. He said, ‘Tell Jack he’s to do all that Captain Prendergast—do you catch the name?—Prendergast—tells you to do, and then to wait till I come back. Perhaps the good captain will take you away for a spell with him.’ Do you understand?”

Jack shook his head. Not one bit did he understand.

“Now, then, take the letter in your hand. Here, take off that red rag round your neck, and try to look a little more like a gentleman’s son. So! Follow me. When you see me stop before a door and look round, you come up and knock at the door. Then you leave the letter and wait. If they ask you who sent the letter, you say Captain Prendergast. If they ask you where he is, you say you are not to tell. And when



you have got an answer, get quick outside the door, and dodge round the corner. Then you hurry back to me; and if you lose the money, I'll skin you alive. If they come out after you, keep dodging about, but don't come back here."

Jack took the letter, and followed his adviser for a street or two. Suddenly Mr. Cardiff turned back.

"Who sent the letter, boy?"

"Captain Prendergast."

"Good! Where does he live?"

"I'm not to tell."

"Good!"

Then they went up street after street till they came to a great old-fashioned house standing well back from the road, with gardens stretching back behind it, a place that looked what it was—the town residence of a county family before any family went up to London. Mr. Cardiff nodded his head, crossed over, and passed on. Jack entered boldly, rang the bell, and waited. A footman in livery opened the door, and took his letter, leaving him waiting in the hall. Presently there was a buzz of voices as another door opened and shut, and the footman came back and beckoned Jack to follow him.

A breakfast-room: a lady making tea, and two gentlemen, one of whom was a precise, middle-aged man dressed in black, who looked like what he really was—a lawyer. At the table stood a third man, a great, heavy-looking man, who held his hat in his hand, and was reading, Jack thought very oddly, Captain Prendergast's letter.

"What a pretty boy!" cried the lady. "Is it possible"—

"My dear lady," said the lawyer, "pray—pray allow me. Boy," he began, in an awful voice, "what is your name?"

"Jack Armstrong, sir."

"And you live?"

"I walk about with Myles Cuolahan, who carries a pack."

"You were not with him three months ago," said the big man.

"No; I was at Mr. Bastable's at Sheffield."

"A pretty story, indeed," said the lawyer. "Now, Mr. Inspector Mahaffy"—

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the policeman, "but I think

there's a deeper plant. Myles Cuolahan is a very honest fellow, and the boy is new to it. Who did you leave in the street, my boy?"

"Cardiff Jack."

You see, the question expected by the letter-writer was not asked, and the boy naturally told the exact truth.

Mr. Mahaffy started. Here was candour.

"Cardiff Jack told me that Captain Prendergast sent the letter. I am not to tell where Captain Prendergast lives." Jack volunteered this information with the calmness of innocence.

"Ah! And where might Cardiff Jack be?"

"He is staying at the Grapes Inn, where we two slept last night—Myles and me."

"And where is Myles Cuolahan?" asked Mahaffy. "Does he know that you have got the letter?"

"He is gone up-town to sell his things. Please, I must get back, if you'll give me the answer. Cardiff Jack said that Myles said that I was to take Captain Prendergast's letter."

"The boy, ma'am," said Mr. Mahaffy, "is as innocent as your ladyship. And Cardiff Jack is the biggest rogue in the three kingdoms. Twenty years' run he's had of it, barring a little spell in Millbank. But we've got him now. After all, it's only a six months' business. Lucky for us that the boy is innocent, and let everything out. And now, sir, I hope you won't be under no more alarm about these letters. Lord bless you! Cardiff Jack knows all the family histories of half a dozen counties, and could pitch a letter into any one of 'em as would astonish them like a Prooshan bombshell! Lord! Lord! to think how people will be frightened by a clumsy jemmy like that. A good trick, too, to send the very identical heir to the property for you to look at. Kind of invitation for you to make cold meat on him at once. Beg your ladyship's pardon. When I get on the subject of the Captain, my tongue regular runs away with me. Please keep the boy for a bit, while I slip out at the back and effects the capture. It won't take above half an hour. He might have a bit o' breakfast. Don't your ladyship have no more fear.

And as for that boy—I know boys—and he's as innocent as any sucking dove."

At twelve o'clock Myles returned from his business with a lighter pack and a heavier pocket. He noticed some agitation in the neighbourhood of the Grapes, but thought nothing of it till he entered the bar of the hostelry, and was confronted by the landlord.

"Well, Mr. Cuolahan, this is a good day's work this is."

"What is it at all?" asked Myles.

"Here's Mr. Cardiff, the biggest gentleman on the road, marched off to gaol; here's my house insulted; here's your little devil of a cub gone and peached on the Captain; and I'll thank you to take your d——d teetotal, temperance preachin', sneakin' boy and yourself off as quick as you like."

"Where's Jack?"

"If you mean Mr. Cardiff, he's in quod; and if you mean your little devil, he's locked upstairs."

Myles calmly mounted the stairs, unlocked the door, and brought out his prisoner. Then he went down again, and invited the landlord to step outside and take a few rounds in adjustment of the quarrel. This being refused, on the ground of conscientious scruples against the ordeal by battle, Myles permitted himself to fall into undignified wrath, and politely offered to fight any man among the lot, whose personal gallantry he impugned, and finally marched off flourishing his stick, and cracking scornful fingers in the eyes of the bystanders.

In front of the police station was Mr. Mahaffy, who shook his head sorrowfully.

"Myles Cuolahan, I didn't think you'd have done it."

"I didn't do it," said Myles.

"You did, Myles. It was all your fault. What be you taking a boy like that to the Grapes for? And what do you expect will be the end of him, and of you too, if he goes on associating with that lot? Why, General Duckett was there last night, and Shallow Bob, and Tom Lock, as well as Cardiff Jack. For shame, Myles! for shame!"

Myles hung his head, and went on his way, speaking



nothing for a mile or two. Then he pulled himself together, chanted a stave or two, and then he clapped the boy on the shoulder.

"Never again, Jack, my boy—never again."

But the mischief was done, and Captain Cardiff, in dungeon vile, was vowing vengeance against the boy,

## CHAPTER IX.

OUT of the town and on the tramp. Jack Armstrong looks back to that nine months, now twenty years behind him, with that feeling which makes us dwell upon certain portions of our lives till they lengthen out, and assume dimensions in the memory out of all proportion with their length. As some men love to recall every incident of their undergraduate career, the day they were proctorised, the day they were upset driving tandem, the day they did *not* get their First, and all the rest of the important nothings—so Jack and Myles talk still over their six months' companionship, when they tramped up and down, and tired not of each other, through the leafy lanes of England. They have forgotten the days when it rained, the days when it was too hot or too cold, the long road which seemed to the boy as if it would never have an end; the discomfort of the nights when—for Myles kept his word, and never again took the lad to a tramps' house—they slept in barns on straw, or on a wooden bench in some cottage that could give them no other accommodation. It was a pleasant, careless time for man and boy. Their way lay chiefly off the highroads, often across fields, or along lanes, which in summer were bright with foxglove and meadowsweet, or in autumn were rich with filberts and blackberries. If the weather was fine, they sat under the hedge for their dinner. They lived well, because Myles drove a good trade. They drank coffee, when they could get it; milk, when that could be bought; water, when both failed. Myles knew all the cottagers and their wives. He was always in good temper. He sang, talked, and told stories

to beguile the way; and he even tried to improve his own and the boy's mind by reading aloud from the geography book. Thus, after dinner, instead of a siesta, they would read how the kingdom of Siam was bordered on the north, and what were its principal towns. Then there were the tramps to meet. Myles knew them nearly all, from the gipsy to the barrel-organ man, and could talk their tongues, from Romanly to thieves' slang. Once it was an Italian, labouring heavily along with his grinding instrument. Him Myles accosted with a shout.

"Sit down, man, and have a bite with us. I remember you. I seen you at Pietro Corti's—you savey, Corti. That's where it was. Sticking his knife, he was, Jack, into another grinder, when I seen him last."

Jack looked with curiosity on a fellow-creature who had gone near to murder some one. There was a cool deliberation, too, about the way in which Myles conveyed the information.

The man sat down and broke bread. Presently he rose, laughed his thanks, and went on his way.

"Union Court, Saffron Hill—that's where Pietro Corti lives. The organ-men meet there every night, and fight over their wine. They didn't drink beer—not they. Day-time, the house is full of tin-plate makers. They drink rum."

Jack got a little confused between rum-drinking tin-plate makers and Italians who slowly stick knives into each other.

When the geography book was finished, Myles bought a work on English history, promising Jack grand tales when they should get to the deeds of the Saxons in Ireland.

It was a great disappointment. There were none. Not a line about Cromwell at Drogheda—nothing on the spoliation of the land—more extraordinary still, not a word about Myles's own ancestors, the kings of Connaught.

"And me, Jack," he said, "a king meself, if everybody had his rights, barring the O'Gormans that lives by Lough Derg, on their own land, though Lord Enniskillen calls it his, and the MacSwires of Pettigo, where my own eldest brother was bound to a shoemaker."

"The son of a king is a prince," observed Jack. "Are you a prince, Myles?"

"Bedad, Jack, there's many a prince isn't a better man than me. And I'd fight any prince that's going, left-handed, I would, and be honoured entirely if he beat me."

Jack's notions of royalty became confused, and a prince was henceforth irrevocably associated in his mind with a flat box full of "swag" and the temperance pledge. It must be confessed that, years afterwards, when he first saw the Prince of Wales, it was a shock to observe that, so far from carrying a pedlar's pack, his Royal Highness was attired as an ordinary English gentleman.

"They've got," whispered Myles, looking round to see that no one was within a mile or two—"they've got the very sword that we used to fight with before I was born. It lies under the thatch to the left of the mud chimney as ye go into my grandfather's cottage. I saw it once, when I was your age, Jack. It was on our way to Belfast that my father took us. All the neighbours came in, and there was many a *cead mille failthe*, I can tell you, when they saw us. He sat, the ould man, on a cushion, and the rest of us on stone benches, I remember. There was bacon and the strings of onions hanging over his head, and the supper cooking in a pot. Such a supper, Jack!—potatoes and bacon, *mescharuns* and butter, oat bread and noggins of milk. And after that the whisky punch, while he pulled down the sword from the thatch, and we sang the Irish songs and told stories of our own great days before any of us was born nor heard of."

Jack began to wonder what would happen if the English succeeded in finding the sword. Myles went on, his blood roused by the memories of his childhood, pouring out stories of the Irish peasantry, to which he belonged by birth, their superstitions, their pride, and their prejudices. But none of this was intelligible to little Jack, who retained only a confused dream of English cruelty and Irish virtue, with a glow of shame that he should belong by birth to the race of the oppressors.

Strange and various were the acquaintances who saluted



Myles upon the road. The commonest was the slouching tramp. He, as one beneath the pedlar's social grade, only touched his hat as he passed, with a "Fine day, Mister Cuolahan." For him, too, Myles had a word of friendly recognition, and a conversation would ensue in the argot of the road, which some mistake for Gipsy. The honest pedlar knew this as well as the nobler tongue; but it was Greek to the boy. The tramp was always down on his luck, and was for ever complaining. "I went," he would say mournfully, feeling an empty pocket, "I went to the back jigger myself, and did the patter, because the ken was dead to Cockney Fred, my pal; as for the mot, it's shin; the slavey's been always good for a kant, and the cove for a bob; but, Lord love you, the cove wasn't at home, and the slavey'd been changed, and the ken was coopered—and not a thing hanging about anywheres within reach."

By some instinct the boy knew well enough that he was listening to one who was liar, thief, and common malingering skulk by profession, though Myles was too kind to mention the little circumstance.

The road people of those days got their living in various ways. All of them knew a trade, though they were loth to exercise it when begging would fill their stomachs with far less trouble. They could make ladders, flower-stands, nets, and all sorts of tin smithery. But, by their sharp and shifty eyes, by their involuntary and frequent pauses in their work, and by a peculiar slouch in their walk, which spoke of a hole-and-corner life, and a disinclination to be recognised, you might recognise the tramp. A few there were, but these chiefly confined to the great towns and the highroads, who pretended to no trade at all. One old man, for instance, was once pointed out to Jack by Myles as a person of the highest distinction; "for," said he, "he invented the routers." Seeing the boy unmoved by the information, he went on to explain how, before the Poor Law Act, the Irish who became chargeable on the parish used to be sent on to Ireland by way of Bristol, receiving three-halfpence a mile and free lodgings. The venerable patriarch before them was the

inventor of a system of perpetual motion, by which the Irish paupers returned to England by the next boat after landing in Dublin, begged their way back to London, and so got sent on again, and so on, *de capo*, the whole forming a life of novelty, freshness, and continual change, coupled with freedom from anxiety, and endless opportunities for improving the mind. The passing of the New Act put an end to this system, and condemned these poor people to settle down. So, in the Middle Ages, it was an endless delight to go on pilgrimage. You left your wife and family, your debts and your duns, your duties and your dangers; you wandered pleasantly from convent to convent, always meeting with clean straw for a bed, a hot supper, and a breakfast. And when you returned home, after pious years of prayer, you found the squalling babies grown up—having been fed by the monks—and able to work for you, your debts forgotten, your duns dead. Then the Christian Hajj, in the odour of sanctity, passed the rest of his days in idleness and glory. The good time was stopped by bulls and rescripts from Pope and bishops, and the pious peasant was fain to stay at home, work off his liabilities in the sweat of his brow, and put bread into the mouths of the children.

Besides the tramps, the roads were occupied, so to speak, by the ladies and gentlemen who live by trading on the credulity of the populace. Such were the "crocuses," who lived by the sale of pills and drugs—a pestilent tribe. Their head and captain was Manchester Joe, a chieftain who, had he been able to read and write, might have risen to eminence. But the race of crocuses was even then almost extinct. With them marched the "Charley-pitchers," who gained an honourable livelihood with the thimble and the pea—a game now also falling into decay. This tribe worked in pairs, one being the "Button," that is, the confederate who egged on the flats; and Myles once pointed out to Jack the gentleman who was reckoned the very best button in all England. He bore the garb and the appearance of a Methodist clergyman, but with more external meekness. Dressed in black, with a large white tie, he would slowly pass by the Charley-pitcher

with an air of meditation, as if he were thinking out his next sermon. Being surprised into looking on at the game, he would laugh at its simplicity, and then, remarking to the bystanders, as if he were in some doubt, that there could be no real religious harm in taking money from fellows so foolish, would bet and win. Ladies generally accompanied these professionals, their share of the work being to pick the pockets of yokels. Like the Sirens, they first bewitched their prey. After twenty years of road-life, Myles Cuolahan regarded these tramps a good deal from their own point of view. He was not above sitting at meat with them, as we have seen, and would talk familiarly with them. Moreover, he admired success, even that of a common wayside cheat, and conceded the palm of honour to lawless audacity as readily as to virtue. With such men, Claude Duval is a hero, and Robin Hood a demigod.

All this, however, belonged to the old habits, when poor Biddy tramped after him along the road, and he fought, drank, and flourished with the rest. For Jack's sake he changed his companions; for Jack's sake and the sake of the little Norah. Should the girl, now being brought up a lady, ever have to blush for Jack, the friend of her infancy?

But what was he to do with the boy? He put it to him as a problem demanding his most serious consideration. Jack could arrive at no conclusion.

"All thim people we meet on the road, Jack, is thieves and gonephs. You've got to make yourself a gentleman—Lord knows how!"

Somehow, Jack felt that it would not do to turn tramp, or even to take out a pedlar's licence. There were nobler ambitions. Every other line of life, as he saw it in the little country towns and villages, seemed full of interest. He would be a blacksmith, swinging a heavy hammer on the resounding anvil amid the sparks; he would be a wheelwright, a carpenter—always a maker, hammerer, and forger of something, for the life of inaction had no charms for him. Once, for the first time in his life, he saw a regiment of soldiers marching with flying colours and playing band. Myles



pricked up his ears, threw back his shoulders, straightened his back, and shouldered his staff. So did Jack; and the pair marched on, man and boy, in military step and with beating pulse, till the music passed by and the soldiers were out of sight.

"I'll be a soldier, Myles," said Jack.

"So you shall," cried Myles, his cheeks aglow. "So you shall. Bedad! it's a fine thing to be a soldier. I'll give ye the ould sword in my grandfather's thatch, and you shall carry it with the green flag in the other hand. I was drilled meself once, Jack. 'Twas in the Repale days. We used to turn out a hundred strong and be drilled in the cowl'd under the moon; but we had no band of music. If Ireland wants to fight as well as to talk, she'll get the music first."

And once they were at a little seaside town, where were a few small craft in the coast trade. Jack saw the men heaving the anchor with their sailors' song, and watched the sails drop and the vessels slip away out to sea, and be lost in the mist. Presently he clutched Myles by the hand, "Myles, I'll be a sailor."

But how he was to be anything except what he was, the uneducated companion of an uneducated pedlar, by what ladder he was to mount to the higher world, he neither knew nor cared. Nor did Myles. To have the boy with him, some one to talk with, some one to pour out his thoughts to, some one to think of, lightened his days, and kept him out of temptation. Moreover, for a sense of responsibility leads one to reflect, he began to instruct Jack in a system of moral philosophy. All philosophy, like geometry, rests on a few axioms and definitions. Myles having laid down his definitions, proceeded to build his edifice, and the Irishman being as logical a creature as the Frenchman, he began to erect a superstructure which might have led to very singular results in Jack's after-life but for certain events which changed their fashion of life altogether.

## CHAPTER X.

IT was a warm soft afternoon in August, that Myles and Jack were toiling slowly over the downs which rise up from the seashore in the neighbourhood of Esbrough, whither Myles was going to show Jack his native place. The villages are thinly scattered among these hills, and the byroads connecting them are sometimes intricate and difficult to find. They had lost their way, as there was no sign-post in sight, no house, village, farm, nor church anywhere near. They were tired, hungry, and thirsty. Presently Jack put his hand in Myles's. It was his sign of utter breakdown, and Myles, stopping, saw the boy's knees trembling as he stood, and the tears of pain standing in his eyes.

"What's to do, old chap?" he said. "Can't you hold out to the top of the hill?"

"I'm so tired, Myles, and so thirsty. Let us sit down."

"Climb up on my back," said Myles.

He took up the boy as Sinbad took up his selfish old man, and went on again. The hill-top reached, another weary expanse of road stretched before them. Without a word, Myles trudged on, though the boy was heavy and the pack was full.

The boy grew heavier every moment, the Irishman's throat became more parched, and he was beginning to think of sitting down himself, when he suddenly came, in a drop of the road, upon a solitary house. Not a lonely-looking house, because it stood behind a clean-trimmed lawn, with flowers and creepers and trees about it, and with a plantation of firs on either side. A house of some stateliness, not belonging to a rich man, but to some one who could afford at least the luxury of a garden. Myles stopped, set down the boy, and looked over the hedge.

"Now, Jack, we shall get a drink of water, and we can ask our way."

On the lawn in front of the house was walking, his hands behind his back, an elderly clergyman, with grey hair, gold

spectacles, and kindly face. On a garden table lay a great book, the biggest book that Jack had ever seen. He looked up when he heard the heels upon his gravel.

Myles touched his hat respectfully.

"I do not want to buy anything, my good man," said the clergyman.

"I do not want to sell anything, sir," said Myles, "begging your reverence's pardon. We've walked a long way, and my boy's very tired. Will you give him a glass of water?"

"Surely—surely. Let me look at the boy. Why—why—sit down, my child, sit down."

Jack made an attempt to move; but he was too footsore and lame. Myles lifted him into the chair pointed at by his host, who called his housekeeper. A good-looking, portly woman of forty came at his summons, and Jack was presently carried away to the kitchen, where a draught of milk revived him.

"'Tis the blessed stuff," said Myles. "Maybe, ma'am, there's a little left of it still."

She brought a jug full, holding about a pint and a half. He took a mighty pull, and set down the vessel empty.

Meantime the housekeeper was attending to the boy.

"He can't walk any further to-day," she said to her master. "He's dead beat; and it's ten miles along the road to Esbrough."

"Ten miles; so it is—ten miles. Well, Mrs. Prosser, we must do the best we can for them. They can stay here to-night if they will."

"The man might go on," said the housekeeper suspiciously.

"It is six o'clock now," said her master. "Nonsense, Mrs. Prosser. You can give him the room over the stables. Take off the boy's shoes and stockings, and make Mary wash his feet."

"Shure, ye're a kind-hearted man," said Myles.

After dinner the clergyman sent word that he would like to see the boy. Jack was sent up to him, and Myles remained downstairs, where he had already worked his way through five or six pounds of cold beef, and was now ingratiating himself with the housekeeper.



"Would you like a cup of tea, Mr. Cuolahan?" asked Mrs. Prosser.

"Would I like a cup o' tay, ma'am? Would I like forty cups o' tay, av it's poured out by yourself!"

"Are you a married man, Mr. Cuolahan?"

"A widower, ma'am—a poor, disconsolate widower."

"With only that boy?"

"That boy, ma'am, is little Jack Armstrong, not my boy at all. His father was a gentleman. And I've got one little girl now living with Miss Ferens at Bedesbury. Only a widower, ma'am."

Mrs. Prosser sighed.

"My first, ma'am, was something in your style," Myles went on. "Full, ripe, and comfortable. But not so—not so much so, ma'am. In a humbler way. Ah, Mrs. Prosser! when the Lord made you He turned out the raal illigant article."

"Mr. Cuolahan! I'm ashamed of you, talking in that profane way. And master a clergyman and all."

"It's gratitude, Mrs. Posser; it's gratitude"——

How far the conversation might have gone it is difficult to conjecture; it was interrupted by an announcement from Mary, the maid, that the master wanted to speak to the boy's father.

"And that's me, I suppose," said Myles, rising. "Not that it's true; and his poor mother, that's dead and gone, wouldn't have liked it said."

The clergyman was sitting in his study, crammed and piled with books. A small fire burned in the hearth, although it was a warm evening, and a lamp with a green shade was on the table. He was leaning his head on his hands, looking at Jack, sound asleep on the sofa before him.

"Come in, my man. Come in, and let us talk. Tell me about yourself."

Myles gave such information as he thought might be of interest.

"Then he is not your own son, after all?" His eyes brightened as he turned sharply on Myles. "Tell me, my friend, could you give the boy up if you knew he would be educated in a God-fearing way?"

Myles hesitated.

"You cannot think of dragging the boy about the country to learn your wretched life?"

Myles fired up.

"Wretched life, is it? Wretched life—with a trade that brings me in sometimes four pounds a week. Why, there isn't a man on the road that doesn't envy me. Mine a wretched life? Your riverence"—he stepped forward and laid the forefinger of his gigantic hand on the table—"I know a life more wretched."

"I beg your pardon. I did not mean"—

"I know a life more wretched. I've heard tell of boys brought up at Eton, sent to Oxford College, and taught all that books could tache, filled wid ivery taste that money and education could give, and craving for the society of scholars like thimselves, and then sent down to a little country parish, with the nearest town ten miles away, and no neighbours and no scholars at all, to eat out their hearts preaching to rustics, reading books for iver and iver, with no aim nor no object, in just such a study as this, and just such a place as this. That's a more wretched life than mine."

The Rector started and winced. Then he waited for a few moments.

"I am answered," he said. "The life of every man who does work in the world is more happy than mine. I am answered."

Myles was silent. He had fired his shot.

"I was married once. Won't you sit down?" His tone unconsciously changed towards the man who could tell him the truth.

"Take a chair, Mr.—Mr. Cuolahan, thank you. I was married once—many years ago—and I lost my wife and my boy. I can speak of it now without the grief that used to tear me to pieces. He was such a boy as that: not so strong, poor child! with as bright a face, eyes as clear, and voice as sweet. Give me the boy."

"I cannot," said Myles. "Come, Jack, wake up. You must go to bed."

He could not wake the lad, and so took him in his arms, Between them the two men undressed the lad and laid him in a bed hung with rose-coloured curtains and in sheets perfumed with lavender. The old man bent over the boy as he slept, and kissed his cheek.

"Such a one might have been my son—nay, my grandson."

Myles was up and about at six, talking to the groom and chatting with the maids, who were comely. There was an air of order and comfort about the Rectory that soothed his spirit, and he began to think that, after all, life in a garden like this, well clothed, well fed, calm, might not be so miserable as his fancy pictured it.

At nine the clergyman came out upon the lawn, bringing with him the boy, a little abashed at being the object of so much attention.

Myles made his finest bow.

"I wish your riverence the best o' good mornings," he said. "Now, Jack, if you are ready, thank the gentleman in a proper manner, and come along."

"Let him have his breakfast first," said Mr. Fortescue. "Mr. Cuolahan, I have been thinking that I spoke inconsiderately last night."

"Is it about the boy?" asked Myles. "There's no harm done, for I couldn't let Jack go."

"It is not about the boy. It is what I said of your own life. I am sincerely sorry."

Myles laughed.

"Shure its meself that ought to be sorry. Your riverence's life is a beautiful life. Here you sit among the roses, and it's quiet and undisturbed. The old dial there in the sun couldn't have a quieter time. And here you read the beautiful old books. I'd give a thousand pounds this minute if I could read the Latin like your riverence; and Hebrew, too, I'll swear. A lovely life!"

"Nay, it wants work and excitement. You, on the other hand, wandering about the country, study the great book of human nature."

"If 'tis a book," said Myles simply, "we haven't bought



it yet. Jack and I have only just finished the History of England; and not a word of the kings of Connaught."

"Promise me one thing, Mr. Cuolahan," said the Rector. "If you think, on reflection, that it will be well for the boy to be educated—better, I mean, than leading your own exciting and interesting life of—of—adventure, bring him to me, and I will take care of him."

"I will, sir," said Myles, "and thank you very kindly."

"Would you like to stay there altogether, Jack?" he asked, when they were on the road again.

"I don't know," said Jack. "The gentleman came to me in bed this morning, Myles, and said I was his own grandson. See, he gave me this, and told me to keep it."

It was a pocket-book of leather. In it a card, with the name of the donor and his address.

At the top of the hill they looked back. At the garden-gate still stood the old gentleman, looking sadly after them.

"A good sort," said Myles—"a good sort; and I'm sorry I spoke harsh last night. Jack, there's some people that the Lord picks out for reasons of His own. You and I have got to work for our bread. These people don't. They sit in the sunshine all their lives, and do nothing but what they like. After all, 'tis the real happiness in life to have nothing to do but what you like, and the greatest of all good things if you happen to like what does good to other people. My father, for example. He never did a stroke of work in all his life, except what he liked best, and that was for everybody's good; for it was smuggling from county Derry, the most lovely county in all the world, for an illicit still. My father's whisky was so good that all the magistrates and the clergy and the officers of the army used to buy it of him. So he lived for the good of his fellow-creatures, as he often used to say, before he went to confession; and for all the sins he had to confess he might as well have stayed at home. But then, you see, it pleased the praste, who was, besides, his best customer."

They journeyed along the road according to their wont, and Myles was in the middle of another story when he

stopped at sight of a group in the field at their right. Before the little knot of people stretched a great field of some fifty acres, on which there wandered, with all the dignity of lawful possessors of the soil, a troop of geese. Beyond the geese were the people.

"Myles," cried Jack excitedly, "look, look; there's Mr. Bastable and Mrs. Bastable—and—and—look, if there isn't Captain Perrymont himself."

"Bastable it is," said Myles; "but who's the other man? Jack, we're in luck; for of all the men in the world, that's your own father's very best friend—that's Paul Bayliss. Don't you say never a word. You just follow me, and when the right time comes you step to the front while I say, 'Paul Bayliss, here's your old friend's son—here's little Jack Armstrong;' and then see what a reception you'll get. O mother of Moses!"

They hurried along the road till they came to a plank laid across the ditch that served for a bridge, and so got into the field. The party was at the far corner.

"Mrs. Bastable's got the hazel-rod," said Jack. "That's what she used to do her hanky-panky with."

"What tricks are they up to now?" asked Myles, leading the way."

The woman's eyes had the fixed, trancelike expression that Jack remembered well, and she was standing with the rod in her hand just as she had done, though Jack did not remember this, on the day when the grand function of sorcery had been taken in hand. Round her were grouped the three—Bastable, Captain Perrymont, and Paul Bayliss—all intently watching the woman, but with different expressions. Captain Perrymont had the air of one who is conducting a curious and scientific experiment; Bastable wore an anxious and expectant look; Paul Bayliss simply looked on, wondering.

Myles and Jack drew close to the hedge and looked on, but no one saw them.

"It's all nonsense, Captain Perrymont," said Bayliss, with an uneasy laugh as the rod began to twist and turn. "It's

all part of your witchcraft nonsense that brings no luck to any one. Luck," he added bitterly, "whatever did bring luck to me?"

Just then Bastable held out his hand, and made a gesture to his wife.

"Captain Perrymont," he said, "you have seen the working of the hazel rod in your own ground. You may map it out yourself, and compare it with the map I made for you, at your own leisure. This is not your ground, I believe."

"No, it is mine," said Bayliss, "and a precious valuable property it is."

Bastable looked at him in a sharp twinkling way.

"We shall see," he said, "we shall see. Meantime, we will mark where we stopped the work."

He placed a stick in the ground, and in doing so saw Myles and Jack. With the slightest gesture possible, he placed his finger on his lips. At the same time he passed his hand across his wife's face, and, gently turning her round, ordered her to go home straight, and not to look behind her. Unlike the wife of Lot, Keziah Bastable obeyed meekly, and walked silently away, looking neither to the right nor to the left of her; so that she saw neither Jack nor Myles.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE woman gone, Mr. Bastable and the other two were left alone. Myles and the boy stood looking at them over the rails. It was a bright, warm afternoon; the August sunshine lay like a robe of splendour upon the fields, bringing into clear relief every blade of grass, and painting every tuft of rank and useless weed as if it were a spray of silver-gilt, set with diamonds. Beyond, the sea stretched, a sheet of grey-blue, with never a cloud to fleck the surface; and beyond the sea a haze in which the sky-line and the water-line were lost. A lark was singing in the air. The voices of the men fell on Jack's ears like a dream. There was Mr. Bastable—why was he there? There was his father's old friend—it was the first



time that he realised the fact of a father. He looked, and wondered what it all meant.

Paul Bayliss was the first to do anything. He kicked a turf at his feet, looked round, and cast a half glance at the two tramps, presumably father and son, who were standing by the road, and moved moodily off the field without the formality of a farewell to his companions.

"He doesn't know me," said Myles. "Wait till I go to him. Wait till I tell him, 'Paul Bayliss, here's the very boy as was born in the foundry that night when—you remember.' Only wait till then, Jack, and look to see the change as will come over Paul Bayliss."

But Jack had a good many years to wait before that day came.

Then Captain Perrymont, gathering himself together with an effort, as if he had been working out some mighty problem, spoke.

"Come up and see me to-morrow, Bastable. I doubt if it is worked correctly. Albertus Magnus will tell us, and we will look him up. The mesmeric power: it is the only secret. By that power the oracles spoke, the witches divined, the Rosicrucians learned everything, saw everything, and knew everything. The Rosicrucians—Tell me, are you yourself a brother of the Rosy Cross?"

Bastable shook his head.

"I fight for my own hand," he said. "And, besides, who knows better than you, Captain Perrymont, that the Fraternity is dead? They've got a thing called a Rosicrucian Degree in Masonry. Bah! Invented fifty years ago. Not even the elements of the Rosy Cross in it."

"There were three degrees," the Captain went on. "Three degrees, formerly, as there were three degrees of everything. In the first the candidate was lured on to explore the secrets of nature by the promise of the Philosopher's Stone, the Elixir of Life, and the gifts of immortality and invisibility. When he came to the second he was told that the stone meant something very different, the elixir was a fable, and immortality to be read in a different sense. But he learned

that the cultivation of nature's secrets led to the improvement of mankind."

"Oh!" said Mr. Bastable, his face lengthening, "was that all the Rosy Cross taught? Improve mankind!" he sneered. "My business is to improve myself."

"Just so," said the Captain. "But then there was a third degree to which none were admitted but those who were worthy."

"And what did they learn there?"

"Well, my friend," replied Captain Perrymont, turning a steady eye upon his companion, "*should* you ever prove worthy I may tell you the secrets of that degree."

"What are they talkin' about at all, Jack?" said Myles, who was now sitting on the rails, listening, with a newly lit pipe in his mouth. "Rosy Cross? Maybe it's the gipsy's patteran they mean. I'll show it you any day where the Romany folk have passed. I know their tricks and their ways."

"There have been men," said Bastable, "who knew how to transmute metals."

The Captain shook his head.

"No, it is a fable. Gold is gold, and lead is lead. Those who have pretended to the power were liars and quacks. Cagliostro, the mesmerist, pretended; Pigard pretended; Louis XIII. found, himself, a piece of gold in the crucible—but then, Pigard put it there. When they wanted him to operate on a great scale, he made excuses till they grew tired and put him to death. Think no more of it, Bastable. You have a splendid power. Use it for the interests of humanity, and you will prosper. Use it for your own, and it will depart from you, to return no more."

The Captain, who had spoken with great solemnity, tucked his hands beneath his coat-tails and slowly walked away, his eyes turned earthward.

Left alone, Mr. Bastable began putting his instruments of sorcery together. First, he packed up the divining-rod; then he laid his little tubes of metal in order; then he took a long survey of the country; and, lastly, he strode across the field and saluted Myles.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Cuolahan?" he asked.

"Following my trade, like you, Mr. Bastable."

"And the boy with you. How are you, Jack? Ah! I shall never get another like him. Keep him innocent, Cuolahan, if you want him to be any good in the world."

This excellent moral advice was not based on the usual grounds, because Mr. Bastable only regarded innocence from a commercial point of view, the spirits being, he thought, more accessible to innocent childhood.

"Then you shouldn't have frightened him and played your hanky on him, or he'd a been with you still."

"I wasn't frightened, Myles," said Jack.

"It was the spirruts," said Bastable. "What control have I over the spirruts? There's one at home now: answers to the name of Robert; pulls people by the hair. I don't ask them to the house; they come rapping, and invite themselves. Much good it has done me!" he ejaculated mournfully. "As for their messages, they're no use to anybody; they never put me on to a good thing; you can't coin a brass farthing out of what they tell you. Who cares how they *do* get on in the other world? What's the good of Peter telling me he's well and happy? As if I cared whether Peter was happy or not! If they know any secrets they keep them shut up safe for themselves. Yah! The spirruts indeed! Some people might feel honoured; I don't. You wait, and nothing comes. Tot up all the time you spend on your *séances*, and see what profit you've got out of 'em. I wish I was quit of the whole business, I do."

"You forget the grand hanky, when you put the boy in the circle and lit the lamps."

"Well, and it didn't hurt the boy, did it? What did you see, Jack?"

"I don't remember anything about it," said the boy.

"Well, then," replied the magician, "let's have another. Myles, I'll give you a sovereign for the loan of the boy for a night. We'll go to Squire Perryumont's tower, where he keeps his bottles and things. We'll get my wife along, too; and we'll have another Function."



"No, you don't," said Myles. "I am always for letting the good people alone. It's good luck, says the Irish, to speak well of 'em, and good luck to meet them; but it's bad luck to seek 'em, and it's the worst of all possible luck to find 'em when you do look for them. Paddy the Piper tould me himself."

"Well, well," answered Bastable; "but look here, Cuolahan: if you won't lend me Jack, lend me yourself."

"What would I lend you meself for?"

"Half a sovereign and an hour or two with a spade."

Myles hesitated. He distrusted the man.

"It's none of your tricks—none of the good people's devilish work? God bless 'em all the same."

"As if I should ask *you* to help me in the magic!" returned Bastable, with contempt. "I want to dig, man; do you understand?—I want to dig."

"Well, then, dig; who wants to prevent you? And what are you going to dig?"

"I don't know, rightly," Bastable replied, in a hesitating manner. "I don't quite know. It may be water, and it may be coal, and it may be—anything else. Go into the town and buy a spade, and come back here."

"Well—I'll come. What time do you want me?"

"Go straight into Esbrough—it's only half a mile. Leave the boy there behind you, and come back here. Stay; it's a moonlight night, and the sun sets at seven; come back about sunset. You'll take the path by the shore, and bring a spade with you. We shall be quite alone here, and no one will see us."

Myles consented, though with misgivings of the supernatural, being at all times ready to diversify the monotony of life by any little adventure which might offer; and they separated.

Bastable returned to the field, where they saw him sit down on one of the tufts of rank grass, and pull out a book which he fell to studying intently.

The road to Esbrough, half a mile or so away, led, after the field was passed, along the seashore. Myles and Jack were not professed admirers of the picturesque—and, indeed,

if your walk in life necessitates a journey of sixteen or twenty miles a day, there very soon comes a time, even to a poet, when the flattest country is considered the most pleasant. It was flat enough immediately round Esbrough. As for the shore, it was not quite what summer tourists would choose for the site of a watering-place. One likes a shore which has a certain amount of determination, crispness, and character in it. There was nothing crisp at all about the sea-shore near Esbrough. It was a large, wide inlet; what the geography books, in their sweet poetical way, call an "arm of the sea," into which there flowed a river. Some books, in fact, showed their superior knowledge by calling it Esbrough-on-Avon, though the Avon was a good ten miles higher up, and the water that washed those sedgy shores was as salt as any to be found outside the Dead Sea. The waves did not come rolling in, with those long breakers, edged with a silver fringe; those waves rearing their crests like proud horses; those billows that run up the shingly shore, kissing it with the fervour of a bridegroom—which delight the poetic mind. Quite the contrary. They came creeping up slowly, as if they were ashamed of themselves. When it was low tide, there was first a long stretch of sand, and then a long stretch of mud. As the tide rose, the mud first disappeared; then the fat red lug-worms, its occupants, rejoiced and came out to congratulate each other and talk about the weather. Presently they were annoyed that they had not stopped in the cool cavernous retreats of the slimy mud, because the eels came out too, and ate them up. Later on, perhaps retribution, in the shape of a fork, seized the eels, though this was not so certain to happen. As the tide came higher, it made rivers and lakes in the sand, and looked almost sparkling in the sunshine. Sometimes the boys came down and bathed. The treacherous ocean, smiling just as usual, made its arrangements to meet this contingency, converting the dry sands into quicksands, which swallowed up the boys alive, and then they were as sorry as the eels and the lug-worms. The sand all covered up, there remained the rushes and rank seaside grasses, in which the ox-birds made their nests, and

where the wild ducks hid, if anybody—which was a rare occurrence—happened to be about with a gun. When the tide was higher than usual, the birds had their nests drowned out; and then they, in their turn, abused the ocean. Ox-birds possess that instinct of nature which leads them to recognise the daily ebb and flow of the tide, but unfortunately does not go far enough to make them provide against an occasional spring tide. Nature has been very kind in bestowing her instincts and means of self-preservation. Somehow, she never seems to have gone far enough. The hedgehog is generally considered a happy animal as regards fortification, but I have seen a terrier turn him inside out with a dexterous insertion of his foot in the weak point of his armour: it does not quite meet all round. The poor little hare has teeth; but they are a sorry set, after all. The cow's tail was designed to whisk off the flies; but it is not long enough to reach farther than the shoulder. All Nature's designs seem to me to be symbolised by the cow's tail. They are admirable; they are perfect illustrations of benevolence, far-seeing, wide-spread; but they do not reach far enough. It seems, to thinkers like King Alphonso of Castile—the philosopher who thought he could improve on the construction of the universe—as if, having started with such beautiful intentions, Nature should have either made the cow's tail longer, or abolished the flies altogether: the latter for choice.

Myles walked on in silence, thinking over his interview with the clergyman. "Let him have the boy!" And what good could he himself do with him, or for him! He had seen, for the first time in his life, the exquisite orderliness of an English gentleman's house, where everybody was well behaved, and everything was well kept. Would it not be better for the boy if some one would take him in hand, and bring him up and give him a start in life! He thought of Cardiff Jack and the begging-letter; and then he thought of his own hand-to-mouth life, and what might become of Jack if anything happened to himself.

"And little Norah going to be a lady, too!" he said aloud.

Jack looked at him wonderingly.



"Did I speak, Jack? I was thinking of you."

"What of me, Myles?"

"Something the old gentleman said last night and this morning. Say, Jack, would you like to be made a gentleman?"

Jack reflected.

"You don't know what it is, I suppose. There's many kinds of gentlemen. There's them that eat and drink, and smoke, and ride horses, and think about nothing but their own pleasures. That's one kind. But there's a better kind, my boy, a better kind. There's gentlemen that read and learn when they are young, and when they get older use their learning and their money trying to make the world better. They don't always succeed much, because they want to drive us, and we won't be drove; but they try. Father Mathew was one of them gentlemen, Jack, though he was a praste . . . Jack, you don't know, because you're young and strong, and you misremember the trouble that I brought on you before I met the Father . . . you don't know the wickedness and misery that's in the world. It's all alike, in the city and in the country, but it's worse in the city. And what is it done it, I say? Jack, 'tis drink!—'tis drink! In the courts of the old town—wait till you've seen London!—where you can hardly breathe in the rooms, and the decent women ought not to live a day, the people get good wages and spend them all in drink—all, Jack! And so they are slaves to the taverns, and the pawnbrokers are their masters. 'Tis the curse! 'tis the curse of the country! And no one to lift a voice but a son of the soil. There's the clergy—they're a good sort, and charitable, but they can't see beyond the length of their noses; and they won't do nothing unless they can manage it in their own way, and be the head of it. Perhaps you'll say there's the doctor, Jack. The day will come when the doctors will speak; but, Lord! they daren't—they daren't—and nobody daren't! The life and the pluck of the country is being drained out of it. It isn't like what it used to be when they lived in the open, and walked and ran. Now they're shut up in the factories and work the machines. Jack!—Jack!"

"Why, Myles!"

For the man, started on his favourite topic, was swinging his arms backwards and forwards, striding along at such a rate that the boy had to run, pouring out his words with a fierce excitement, and gathering strength for a prophetic denunciation of drink.

"Why, Myles!"

He stopped and laughed.

"I am a fool when I get upon drink, Jack. It's all true for you, ivery word. What was I saying? Well, sometimes I think that I should like to make you another Father Mathew."

"What am I to do then, Myles?"

The talk was a little over Jack's head, and Myles turned the conversation upon the more amusing topic of Ireland, which was, to Jack's imagination, a wild land as full of adventure as the island of Armenia to the Seven Champions.

"I'll tell you," said Myles, "how my father cured his rheumatiz. He was sitting by the fireside, doubled up with it, and groaning, for he'd been out shooting with James M'Geoghegan, next door—the same who keeps the hardware shop—and he'd caught cold. And thin came a beggar-woman to the door and looks in.

"'In the name of God,' she says, 'who's that groanin'?"

"'It's my husband,' says my mother.

"'God help us all! and what's the matter wid him?"

"'He's got pains here, and pains there, and pains all over his poor body.'

"The old woman looked round the house. In the corner stood a great tub full of cowld wather, the same that they used for steepin' the linen.

"'Do what I bid ye,' says she. 'Persuade him that he's going to have a hot bath, and drop him in it in the name of God.'

"'It's a quare medicine,' said my mother, 'but we'll try it.'

"We tried it. We stripped him and told him the bath was ready, and, with the help of a neighbour, me and mother dropped him in, and then ran for our lives. I heard nothing but an awful yell, as he shuffled out of the tub.

“‘Yer sowls to blazes!’ he screamed. ‘I’m scalded intirely!’ He thought, ye see, that the water was hot. And the rheumatiz niver had a chance, and went straight away and niver came back.”

“Tell me about the Repalers, Myles.”

Jack used the Irish pronunciation of the word through ignorance, not for chaff. Myles was gradually losing his accent, save when he told the stories of his childhood. As he had always been accustomed to talk of Repale, and had never investigated the etymology of the word, he preserved the custom. New locutions—that is, those learned in England—he mostly pronounced after the English manner, with a certain richness of accent, a full, sonorous utterance of the vowels that belongs peculiarly to Ireland. An Irishman always speaks as if the mere passage of the words through his lips were a physical enjoyment in itself, like that of drinking port. I do not profess to understand ethnical differences, or to account for them, but I boldly advance this as a fact, and leave it to the Anthropological Society in St. Martin’s Place, whose room is so beautifully decorated with skulls, to account for it; and, as the lady said when she found the lock of hair in the egg, “if they can account for that they can account for anything.”

Jack had reason to remember the road between Paul Bayliss’s field and the town. On the left the tide was running out, so that the sand was left bare, and the mud was beginning to show. It was a bright, hot day; the sun fell on the sails of the craft which were slowly working up the “arm of the sea” above mentioned—potato-luggers, fishing-smacks, small vessels which traded with Esbrough, where there was a creek with a tiny wharf visited by these small vessels and nothing else. Far off, the pathless plain of the ocean, placid and motionless, of a grey-blue, seemed to be waiting for the ships which in a few years were to furrow its surface, and sail from Esbrough to the uttermost parts of the earth. But the fortune of Esbrough was not yet made.

On the right of the road lay a wide ditch, into which there



flapped from time to time a water-rat, with a vicious plunge which meant undying hatred of the human race. Why water-rats so distrust mankind, what traditions they nourish, what memories they keep green among themselves, I know not. Trout may be tickled; the salmon takes the fly, and then, entering into the full measure of the sport, makes his run, pretends to sulk, and suffers himself to be landed; the tiger and the bear fall into the pit; the little cockyolly bird is taken in the net. Yet these never grow wiser. It is only the water-rat who remembers things practised on his ancestors, and refuses to listen to the voice of the hunter, charming though it be.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE road left the shore with a sharp and unexpected turn, where a creek, down which the receding tide was rushing like the Severn at Portskewet, broke the straight line of coast and ran southward.

"There is Esbrough," said Myles. "Now, Jack, hold up your head, for it's the town where your fathers belong to. See, yon's the tower of Esbrough Church. Wait till I take you there! There's the roof of the market; many's the time I've whistled about there, waiting for the evening and Johnny Armstrong. Give me the bundle, boy. Jack Armstrong ought not to enter Esbrough with a travelling hawker at all; an' if he does, he mustn't carry a bag in his hands—give it to me."

They passed along the road where the cottages gradually changed into low terraces of the humbler kind; where the terraces became sprinkled with shops; and so into the High Street of Esbrough town.

Twelve years since Myles had seen it last. Twelve years since the sturdy, curly-haired boy at his side was carried, a helpless baby, out of the place where he had escaped destruction as narrowly as Lot. Twelve years since the flames of poor Johnny Armstrong's homestead lit up the Christmas sky. Myles looked round. There was very little change.

One or two more chimneys showing where a new scrap-iron foundry had been put up; a little more activity in the streets: otherwise the same dull north-country town it had always been. The thriving iron trade in the neighbouring town of Coalingford threw out tendrils here and there, some of which struck Esbrough, causing it to make feeble efforts at creating a trade. None of these had yet succeeded; Paul Bayliss, one of the unsuccessful, represented his brother venturers in gloom and despondency. The shopkeepers stood at their doors; the country-folk lounged at the inn-doors; a solitary waggon rumbled along the cobbled street; and a single pony-carriage was standing before a draper's shop. A sleepy town: a town where afternoon seemed the fittest time of the day to visit it; a town without interest and without history.

"Wait," said Myles, "wait till I take ye to the church!"

He led the way to the Pack-Horse, the inn which he remembered at whose doors, on the Christmas eve when Jack was born, he had stood with Johnny Armstrong.

There was a new landlord, who knew him not. Myles was disappointed. The place which had looked so friendly became cold. But he stepped inside and ordered dinner, making it a sumptuous meal by way of greeting for Jack to the old town.

It was about four o'clock when he led the boy to the church. It was an old thirteenth-century edifice, with a square tower to which no steeple had ever been added. A church with windows of rich stained glass, with flying buttresses, quaint gargoyles, a peal of bells, and a great churchyard lying around it, piled high with graves and mouldering monuments. The church stood on a little hill, and from its porch you looked out over the roofs of the Esbrough houses to the sea in front and a long stretch of green land on either side.

The church door was open, because it was Saturday evening and they were preparing for the Sunday services. Myles took the boy into the building. It was the first time he had ever been in a church.

In the chancel was a monument of a knight with crossed

legs; in a niche knelt a figure in stone; monumental slabs stood upon the walls; beneath the window in the east there ran a long inscription in Latin; beneath the organ-gallery in the west there ran an inscription in English.

"Look round you, boy," said Myles, almost solemnly. "Where you stand," he went on, "the Armstrongs is buried; where they lies buried, there they reigned. Read me now. What does that say?" He pointed to the organ-loft.

"Erected and beautified by John Armstrong, A.D. 1692."

"Good. And now read that, under the painted glass."

It was in queer character, the like of which the boy had never seen.

"I can't read that, Myles."

"No more can't I, Jack," he responded cheerfully. "But I know what it is. It says that John Armstrong put up that window in memory of Dame Eleanor his wife. I know all the monuments. I've been here half a dozen times with poor Johnny. He used to come here and cry when he thought how rich he might have been. See that stone image, with his nose knocked off, praying in the corner?—that's Sir John Armstrong, Knight, slain at the battle of Flodden Field. See that soldier with his legs crossed?—that's Sir John Armstrong as he came back from the Crusades. When his hands was on him it was a spakin' likeness. Look at all the slabs upon the wall—what are they but John Armstrong—John Armstrong? Them's your ancestors, Jack, my boy. Now you know why I tould you to lift your head high and stick out your chin, bekase we were coming to your own place. Maybe," he went on with a shudder, not being accustomed to the religious gloom of old churches; "maybe there's the ghosts of all the Armstrongs about us at the present. They're come to look at you, Jack. You're the last of the lot. Come out now, and I'll show you where your father and your mother is buried, both together. All that there was of him, poor Johnny."

The tombstone erected by Paul Bayliss stood at the north end of the chancel, in the churchyard. A blackberry bush and a rose-tree grew over it, throwing long arms over the



grave and hiding the inscription on the stone. Myles beat them down with his stick.

"Now, Jack; read that."

The boy read, with a strange new feeling upon him:

Sacred to the Memory

OF

JOHN ARMSTRONG,

WHO DIED DECEMBER 24, 1848, AGED 30;

AND OF

SUSAN, HIS WIFE,

WHO DIED THE SAME NIGHT, AGED 24.

"Ay," said Myles. "It was good of Paul Bayliss. Tomorrow we'll go and see him. There's your father and your mother, and you niver saw neither. Now, Jack, give me your hand—so. Stand on the top of your own father's tombstone, and tell me what you see."

"Fields, Myles; and roofs of houses, and the sea."

"The fields belonged to the Armstrongs. Ay! and do still," he added, with an Irishman's belief in the inalienable nature of land. "Just as Pettigo belongs to the Cuolahans in spite of the Earl of Enniskillen. Yours, Jack—if everybody had his rights. The houses stand where there used to be more fields belonging to the Armstrongs. And even the sea's yourn by right, because the Armstrongs had the fishing. Take a good look round, Jack."

He lifted the boy to the ground.

"A gentleman, boy, by birth. And that's better than any other kind of gentleman, because you can't make him nor train him. Remember that always. A gentleman, Jack."

Jack's notions of a gentleman, like his idea of a prince, were considerably confused. But Myles's admonition had an effect. He never forgot the Armstrongs in the church, or the broad expanse of the Armstrong estates as seen from the old churchyard. The experience of this day bore its fruit in the after years.

As they returned through the town Jack caught Myles by the arm.

"Look, Myles, look! There's Cardiff Jack."

Myles looked, and saw a man, bent and stooping, making off as fast as his legs would carry him.

"That's not Cardiff Jack, boy," he said. "Cardiff Jack's never got so low as to be gridling on the main drag—singing, I mean, on the high-road. Cardiff Jack's a gentleman."

Remembering Myles's last advice, never to forget that he himself was a gentleman, the boy felt his power of defining what some people have called "that grand old Saxon word," gentleman, grow less and less. He was to be a gentleman; all the Armstrongs had been gentlemen: Captain Cardiff was a gentleman who wrote lying letters, and got prison for his reward. Was he, then, to imitate Captain Cardiff? He put the problem behind him, and waited for further information.

"But it was Captain Cardiff, Myles," he persisted. "I saw him look up, and he knew us; and then he turned round and ran away."

"Well, if it was," said Myles, "very likely there will be a fight. I'm not afraid of Cardiff Jack any day."

Then he remembered his appointment, and prepared to keep it.

"Let me go part of the way with you," Jack asked.

They set out, Myles buying a spade at the nearest shop, on the road by which they had entered the town. The sun was low now, but there was still an hour of daylight left when they struck upon the lonely road along the sea-shore which led to the place of assignation.

"'Tis a wild spot, isn't it?" said Myles. "A place to murder your enemy in, and no one to know anything about it—see now—and throw him in the ditch. Did I ever tell you of the Black Piper of Pettigo? Wait, then, till you're a bit older, Jack, when I'll let you have the most bloodthirsty story in all Ireland. Don't come any further. Go away back to the town, and take your book and a candle, and a bit of supper, and go to bed. I've got an hour's job for that prince of sinners and devil-raisers, Bastable."

Jack turned obediently, and began his way back to the town, singing, as was his wont whenever he was alone. I

think his songs were not remarkable for correctness of air, because they were picked up anyhow; nor were they accommodated with the proper words, because he learned one half and made up the rest; but they were as true to time as the thrill of the blackbird or the jug-jug of the nightingale. Heaven makes us singing birds, or silent birds—sometimes cawing, discordant birds; and whether we are taught or not, we sing according to our gifts, with what voices we have.

The boy marched along in step with the jolly song he was trolling forth, swinging his limbs, sometimes running and jumping, always with the face of high resolve which was as yet only prophetic, because he was not old enough to have resolved anything. Perhaps David had such a face in the early days upon the slopes of Judah, while he sat upon the hill-side, looking down upon the Wady where Jesse had his vineyards, while the lion which he killed lurked in the rocks at his feet, and tried to make up his mind whether it was worth while to rob the flock and slay the shepherd. With the lion, taking counsel, was his friend the bear, as may be read; and between them they made a mess of it. Now David, as we know, like little Jack, was a boy "ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to."

Jack's eyes were not so sharp, nor his ears so keen, as to hear footsteps behind them as he came down from the town with Myles. Nor did he know that the man whom he had pointed out to the pedlar was creeping after them, half hiding under the hedge, and keeping so far behind as just to hold them in sight and no more. Nor, when he turned and left Myles just past the corner of the road, did he notice the man duck his head and hide where an empty, half-ruined hut gave him an opportunity.

Along the middle of the road came the boy, singing lustily. In the shingle hut, which had been put up for the accommodation of the coastguard, but which was now roofless, crouched a figure watching the child through a hole in the wooden wall. A figure in rags, barefooted, looking half famished and wholly broken down; his fingers clutched nervously the handle of a thick tramp's stick; his legs were



gathered up under his body, in an attitude of expectancy, ready for a spring; his face was the face of Cardiff Jack, but strangely altered for the worse since last we saw it. His cheeks were fallen, and his eyes were bloodshot; the innumerable crow's-feet might have been multiplied a hundred-fold, so seamy and spider-webbed with lines was he; his lips were trembling, not with passion, but with that nervous affection which sometimes rewards the steady tippler. For Mr. Cardiff was down upon his luck. He had worked out his six months with infinite disgust, missing the little creature-comforts of life, and the agreeable society to which he had been accustomed. And on emerging from his cell, he found that everything went wrong with him. Three short months of bad luck, and drink, brought the once gallant Captain Cardiff—almost as famous in his way as Claude Duval—to the condition of a tramp singing a psalm along the street for coppers. That was the result of Jack's information. His present misery was due to the boy: and now—now—after many days, the opportunity was come, and the boy was within his grasp. The immoral crust which lay about the Captain's better nature had not been softened by prison discipline: the words of the chaplain fell on soil as arid as the slopes of Sinai. Mr. Cardiff was a worse man, not a better, for his six months of gaol. In the long hours of solitude he only felt how his conviction would sap his credit with the "profession," and destroy his prestige; he only longed for some opportunity, like the present, to meet the boy, alone with him alone—*solus cum solo*—and have it out. He was disgraced—not in the eyes of the world, for which he cared nothing, but in the eyes of his friends, the rogues inferior to himself because they lacked his superior luck, audacity, and cunning. He might, some day, have revenge.

And the day was come. With an empty pocket, with a heart full of rage, he was grinding out his miserable psalm along the street, when before him, unexpected and unhopèd for, stood Myles and Jack. He sneaked round corners watching them; not hoping to do more than follow and track them down. He crept out after them along the road; he saw

Myles dismiss the boy; and he hid in the house, with his pulses beating, impatient of his vengeance.

But as yet he did not know how to take it. Revenge is a thing that sometimes disappoints one. You may kill, you may torture your enemy; but the deed once done, it is over for him, and you yourself feel just as angry as before. That is the worst of it. Cardiff Jack wanted, in some wild way, to make the boy feel the mischief he had done; to make him participate in his own sufferings; and he could not, in these few moments of reflection, think how this was to be done. However, there was not much time for doubt. The boy passed the hut, suspecting nothing. Suddenly he heard a footstep, and a sort of rush upon him from behind, as with a roar, like a wild beast, the injured letter-writer sprang upon him and dragged him backwards to the ground.

When Jack turned up his eyes, as he was lying flat on his back along the road, with those two fierce hands clutching at his arms, he discovered that he was in the hands of Mr. Cardiff, and clearly perceived that a thrashing, at least, was going to happen to him—probably a very superior thrashing. So he remarked, as if he was not in the least anxious about it—

“I told Myles you were in the town. He will be back here presently; so you had better make haste and let me go.”

The man only hissed; he was in such a rage that he could not even swear. At intervals, words not found in dictionaries, and the fragments of words apparently used in a perverted sense, fell from his lips like the pearls from those of the young lady in the fable. But Jack had heard many such words in his life, and was little moved by them.

“Let me go!” he repeated, trying to get away. But the man’s fingers held him like a vice.

“Let you go?” cried Mr. Cardiff, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. “Let you go? When I’ve murdered you! when I’ve torn the flesh off your bones—when I’ve wrung your neck—when I’ve broken your ribs—when I’ve smashed your skull—when I’ve put out your eyes! Let you go? I’ll roast you to death at a slow fire—I’ll boil you and scald you—I’ll tear

you with pincers—I'll lock you up and cut you to pieces bit by bit—I'll"— Here his voice failed him again, and he fell back upon those fragments of words above referred to, which in their entirety are the household parlance of half the English-speaking race. It must be understood that, out of respect for the memory of Captain Cardiff, now deceased, we have purposely omitted the garnish and ornament with which he set off these short and pithy sentences.

He dragged the boy to his feet, holding him still with one hand, while with the other, in a feeble sort of way, for his wrath made him purposeless, he dabbed him about the head and face. Jack looked up and down the road. There was no one—not a soul in sight; only, far out to sea, the smoke of a passing steamer; only the cry of wild-fowl in the air; only the lapping of the waves upon the shore.

"No one to see us," said his captor. "No one to hear you when you scream. So you needn't look."

"I shall not scream," said Jack quietly.

"You won't? We shall see. Scream now!"

He struck him violently with his fist on the face, so that the blood spouted from the child's nose, but he uttered no cry.

"Scream! You shall scream so that you are heard for ten miles round. You shall scream so that this night shall be remembered in all the country as the night of Cardiff Jack's revenge. Ay! if I swing for it, I will murder you. Then all mean, creeping spies and informers shall tremble when they read of it—Captain Cardiff's revenge. How to do it—how to do it!"

Jack thought it best to hold his tongue. After all, it is not for the victim to suggest his own torture, but rather to pray that some of the fiercer forms may be forgotten. Isaac of York, no doubt, when his teeth were pulled out, remembered how the king's gridiron had been employed in cooking living steaks, and found consolation in the thought.

"How to do it!" The man was mad for the time; he was mad with the desire for revenge, with the memory of privation, with the drink that was in his veins: he was mad, and had it occurred to him to beat out the boy's brains there and



then, there would have been an end of this novel, and only a chapter in the Newgate Calendar. But it did not occur to him; what he was thinking about was to find some means of torturing the boy to death; some subtle mode of refined cruelty, for Mr. Cardiff was no common ruffian, which should gratify his revenge, slowly, slowly, and prolong the agonies of the little villain who had wrought him all this evil.

"There's a place," he said at last, as if speaking to himself: "there's a place, half a mile away from here or so, where there's a little bay. There's no boat ever sails in that bay, and no man, woman, or child that ever comes nigh that spot at night. And there's something there that will do for me. I slept there last night under a tree, and I saw what you shall feel. There's no one to see us, and Myles Cuolahan, when he passes this way home, will hear your screams and wonder where they were. In the morning, when you are dead, I shall bury you there, and no one will ever learn where you died or what became of you. And then I shall prosper. Come."

Jack went with him, knowing how useless it was to resist, but with a sinking heart. At least he would not scream; but what was to be done to him?

The sun was getting lower, and as they turned east the black rack of clouds lowered heavily before his eyes, and all the brightness went out of the world and out of the boy's heart. And yet he neither trembled, nor begged for mercy, nor spoke a single word of fear, as he marched manfully along to his fate, as bravely as ever revolutionist marched out to Satory to be shot, or aristocrat sat in the tumbril waiting his turn.

"When you are dying, little devil," said Mr. Cardiff cheerfully, "you can think of the letter that you delivered for me, and the message that you gave with it. You will say to yourself, So ought all informers to be served. And you will wish you had it to do all over again, when you would do it all over again very differently."

It was a weak sort of speech for an intending murderer to make, but there are times of great emotion when words spring up to our lips like the bubbles on boiling water, meaning

nothing, and of no use, except to show the excitement that rages below. Jack, whose knowledge of human nature was naturally inferior to that of his historian, took the mildness of the speech for a change in the speaker's intentions, and congratulated himself for the moment on the favourable alteration of his captor's sentiments.

Meantime the man was dragging the boy through a gap in the hedge, and across a sea-side field like that where Mr. Bastable had been surveying with a rod the day before. A field without a path on it; a wide stretch of green, rank and tufted, and near the shore sloppy and muddy. It was separated by little ditches full of stagnant black water, where efts and such creatures are found, and by broken-down rails. There were no hedges; there was no house in sight; there was no sign of life; there were no trees—only a hundred yards or so inland stood a row of trees bent and blown all in one direction by the prevalent sea-breeze, while on a little hillock before them was a plantation of black firs. Their way lay eastward; the long line of hills before the boy's eyes looked black and dreary, the bank of cloud behind their crest grew every moment darker, heavier, and more threatening.

The man muttered to himself, staggering sometimes as if from weakness, but it was from passion. He held the boy firmly by the shirt-collar and jacket, but offered no further violence for the present. His lips moved as if they were in silent communion with his soul, as indeed they were; and his fingers, ever and anon, took a tighter grasp of the boy's shoulders.

When they came to a ditch the man took the child in his arms and jumped over with him; when they came to a paling he carried the boy while he stepped over it; never leaving hold of him for one minute. And Jack's courage fell lower and lower as they receded further from the road and the place grew more and more silent and solitary.

Presently Jack saw some object before him standing out against the sky, a queer thing, seeming in the evening light to be some giant animal on its back, holding up long arms, a dozen or more, against the sky. It was immediately in front

of the little hillock crowned with pines that this strange thing lay. The sea made a sharp, unexpected little gulf here by the aid of a low tongue of land. The sand ran nearly to the foot of the pines. Beyond the sand, of course, was the mud. And the strange thing was lying in the mud.

Seeing it, Captain Cardiff gave a shout of triumph.

"We're coming to it, little devil," he growled. "We're coming to it, at last. And now you shall see what it is to offend Jack Cardiff."

It was a sedgy, dreary shore which lay round the little bay; a shore on which the reedy grass grew in patches quite close to the line of weed—not real, honest seaweed, green and bright, smelling of ozone and lying piled in masses of twisted ribbons, mixed with sand and shells and the backbones of cuttle-fish, such as we see on the south coast and at the back of the Isle of Wight; but a mixture of black mud and grey-green weed, in which foul worms crept and sea-slugs found a temporary home; weed where the wild ducks came to look for food, and found it in the foolish worms and slugs. The fringe of weed lay close to the patches of grass and below a cliff of at least a foot high; and beyond the weed was spread the mud: beyond the mud you saw the bright waters of the German Ocean creeping slowly upwards as the tide was rising.

And on the shore Mr. Cardiff sat down and heaved a mighty sigh.

"At last!" he said. "Boy and devil, in the prison where you sent me I made a vow. I swore that I would follow you. I took a solemn oath on the Bible that they left in my cell that I would have revenge, sooner or later. I've found it sooner. Now, you've got to die."

Jack answered nothing, only he remembered his word—that nothing should make him scream, and braced his little heart for the worst; for now he saw that it was a grim reality, and that the man meant the worst that he could do.

"It's come sooner than I expected," said Mr. Cardiff—"much sooner. Now sit down, and pull off my boots."

This surprising commencement of a violent death so astonished Jack that he only stared.



"Sit down, I say. No; kneel down, and pull off my boots."

The boy knelt down and unlaced his captor's boots, a work which, owing to the complication of knots, and the intermixture of leather and string, took him some time. However, Mr. Cardiff seemed in no hurry, sitting in patience, only looking to see that the work was really under weigh, until it was finished. He wore, perhaps from caprice—English gentlemen are apt to be eccentric—no stockings at all.

"Tuck up my trousers," he said, "as high as they will go."

Jack dutifully rolled them up—they were a loose and ill-fitting pair—till they reached to a foot or so above the knees. It is a remarkable fact that in after life the sight of a man's bare leg, even if it was as well shapen as that of Mr. Cardiff's, always gave him a disagreeable feeling, as if some one was reviving an unpleasant recollection.

"There's a leg!" said Mr. Cardiff complacently, smiting the right member with the hollow of his hand. "There's the leg, you little devil, that you shut up in prison for six months. And those are the feet—handsomer feet never walked—that had to take exercise in a prison-yard. Do you think you will ever have such a leg and such a foot? Never, because you are going to die. Perhaps you don't know what that means? You'll soon find out. And all the time you're dying, just you think, only you just say to yourself, 'It serves me d——d well right, 'cos I got Captain Cardiff, the best and foremost of all the letter writers in England, six months' quod.' And now I think we're 'most ready. Stay. Go down on your knees to me and say after me. Kneel down, I say."

Jack knelt.

"Say, 'Captain Cardiff—noble Captain Cardiff, king of the begging letter-writers.'"

Jack repeated.

"I repent, and am very sorry——"

"I repent, and am very sorry——"

"That by word or deed, by act or speech——"

"That by word or deed, by act or speech——"

"I got you six months' quod——"

"I did not get you sixty years' quod."

Mr. Cardiff started to his feet with a surprise that, but for the determination in his breast, might have led to milder counsels. As it was, he swore an oath as great as any that William Rufus, or even a Californian, ever set his lips to—an oath so full, so round, so blasphemous, that not even the gravity of the occasion could justify it. It was more than equal to the subject: like the duty of the Marlborough master, it was overdone, and smacked of priggishness. Yet, to those who knew the man, there was nothing of unreality or affectation in it. Mr. Cardiff, on the occasion of the greatest surprise in his whole life, simply employed the biggest oath that he possessed. That once discharged, he relapsed, after the manner of inferior artists, into numerous commonplace damns. And then, for he had never once let the boy go, even when he was pulling off his boots, he turned him round face to face with the queer thing that he had noticed on the way.

"Look there, boy," he said, with a certain grandeur, "see your grave."

It did not look like Jack's idea of a grave, being the wreck, consisting of rib-bones and a bit of keel, of an old coaling craft that had got washed up into the bay some dark night many years before, and now lay, sticking in the mud with its ribs held up aloft, waiting till time and the waves should separate the upright timbers from the keel. The decks were all gone, and the poop and the bows; and there was nothing left at all save the frame and the keel.

"I slept here last night," said Mr. Cardiff, rubbing his foot meditatively, which he had struck upon a sharp reed—"I slept here last night, because I had lost my way, and because I had no money if I found it. I slept beneath those trees, and I watched the tide come up in the moonlight. First it covered all the mud, and then it covered the old keel there; and then it climbed up the ribs slowly—little devil, slowly—and then it covered them too. I lay and watched. I was cold, and I had no drink, no tobacco, no covering. Through you I was hungry—through you; and when I went to sleep, I had a dream. I dreamed that I was here with you, just as I am now; and the tide was rising, just as it is now; and

the moon was shining, just as it will be presently ; and that I was doing with you just what I am doing now."

He threw the boy, who made no kind of resistance, over his shoulder, and stepped out upon the sand first, and then into the mud. The wreck lay a hundred yards out, and the mud was more than knee-deep ; so that it took a long time to wade through it. It was reached at last, and, mounting on the sunken keel, which lay a foot or more deep in the black mud, Mr. Cardiff set to work. Close to his hand stood the shortest rib of any, a piece of bent oak, from which some one—a passing labourer, perhaps—had sawn the upper part, leaving about eight feet of wood. Where it bent round, a large nail, red and rusty, projected some six inches. Mr. Cardiff took the unresisting boy, and placed him with his back against the wood, so that he faced the land, one of his feet supported by the nail. Then he drew from his trousers pocket a piece of string, good stout whip-cord.

"Lucky I had this, little devil," he murmured. "If I hadn't thought of this bit o' string, I might have had to brain you. This is a much better way, this is."

He tied the cord round the boy's body, running it round and round, leaving only his arms free, and binding his feet, so that he had no power of moving them at all. When he was tied up so tight, secured with so many knots, that there was no chance at all of his being able to move, he stepped back upon the mud. As his weight left the keel, the poor old wreck gave a sensible lurch. The mud was softer, because the tide was rising, and the man's movements on the wreck disturbed the settlement of years.

Then the ruffian boxed the boy's ears. It was the last outrage, and it seemed the most cruel. If the tears stood in the boy's eyes, if his cheek was pale, if his mouth quivered, his steady gaze never dropped, nor did his courage fail, nor did he scream.

"I now," said Mr. Cardiff, "step ashore. You will see me, if you turn your head, sit down on the shore, and light my pipe. Presently you will feel the water flowing round your feet. Then it will reach to your knees. I shall be



looking on all the time. Then you will feel it mount higher and higher, but you will not be able to move. After two or three hours, you will feel it round your neck. I shall be looking on all the time, for there will be a fine moon to-night. Then you will begin to scream, and I shall laugh. You won't scream very long, for the water will mount over your face and drown you, drown you, drown you, and I shall be there to see."

And saying this, the miserable man plunged again into the mud, and waded back to shore, leaving Jack tied to the beam, awaiting his fate.

### CHAPTER XIII.

MYLES, who was little better than a child, found his spirits droop when Jack left him. The place was lonely; the evening was falling; before him the setting sun made athwart the waters a luminous broad path, as inviting as the flowery slope of Avernus; the hills of the Durham coast, over which he was sinking, were as golden and as bright as the rack of cloud which lay above them; behind the Irishman, as he marched along, his shadow followed, lengthening every moment, so that when he looked round it seemed like some gigantic Jinn, armed with the strange and awful instrument into which the shadow converted the spade. On the right of him stretched the sand and mud: where the wavelets quietly lapped the black and shiny surface, there ran and hopped about a flock of ox-birds or dunlins, digging out the juicy slugs from the mud, and chattering to each other in their sweet low tones, suggestive of mutual confidences and belief in the multitudinous existence of worms. No doubt in the mud the worms were whispering to each other their own hymns of thankfulness for warm weather, and of faith in the permanence of feeding grounds and the certainty of life. The road along which Myles walked was a mere track over the sand; and was fringed with the long, fine grass, and those flowers which flourish on a sandy shore. There grew the sea-holly, like a thistle with its blue flowers and sad grey leaves.

There was the yellow-horned poppy, its large splay-leaved flowers just closing their petals for the night, and hanging their heads among the hoary foliage. There was the white flower of the scurvy-grass; there were the pink blossom of the thrift, and the tufted flower-stalk of the sea-lavender. The birds rose at the sound of Myles's feet, and the flowers were crushed beneath his heavy tread; but he took small notice of these trifles. The evening oppressed him: there was a dead silence; there was no wind, and it was warm. He began to be afraid, as if something was going to happen. No warning voice told him what it was, and that but a quarter of a mile behind, Jack was lying on the ground in the clutches of a man maddened with the lust of revenge. Then he began to whistle, but stopped, because it seemed to him as if some one else was whistling. Then he looked round nervously, shook himself together, laughed, and began to sing aloud. First he began a gipsy song—not one of those from Charles Leland's book—

“’Tis of a Rommany juva,  
And Lura was her name,  
And how a gorgio rya  
Her black eyes brought to shame.”

There, apparently, his memory failed him.

“What’s the good,” he said aloud, “of a tramp’s song?” Then he looked round like a bullfinch trying to remember where he left off last, and began an Irish ditty—one of the kind, I fear, manufactured by the perfidious Saxon, and passed off as Irish. There was not, perhaps, the genuine ring about it, had Myles been able to distinguish. It was a song with five or six verses, “All about me own people,” said Myles, “and the King of Connaught.” This was how it ran:—

“Me grandfathers sat on a throne,  
With pipers and harrups of pride;  
I sit at my door on a stone,  
With the childher and Biddy beside.  
The field, and the bog, and the lough,  
Was theirs—niver bargained nor bought;  
Not a sod is there left, nor a rock,  
For my own,” said the King of Connaught.

## THIS SON OF VULCAN.

" 'Tis all wan ; av 'tis frieze or 'tis silk,  
 The whisky's as warm as the wine :  
 Wid praties and butther, wid meschauns and milk,  
 Whose supper is betther than mine ?  
 Go fetch me the bottle, asthore :  
 From Derry the potheen was brought ;  
 Sure, what can a mortal want more  
 Than the best ? " said the King of Connaught.

" Sometimes, when my thoughts go asthray,  
 I'm a king in a castle o' light,  
 Where the bhoys got no rint for to pay,  
 And the girls do be dancin' all night.  
 There's lashins—the finest—to dhrink :  
 There's kisses—the best—to be caught,  
 Fine times we'll be havin', I think,  
 When I come to my crown o' Connaught.

" The wakes ! 'twill be pleasure to die :  
 The fightin' ! and grand to be kilt :  
 Wid tales of the troubles gone by :  
 When the Pallis is fashuned an' built.  
 No landlord to reap what we sow :  
 No tenant-right lies to be taught :  
 And to school all my subjects shall go,  
 To learn of the King of Connaught.

" The praste—if I know it—shall cease  
 To meddle and make at his will :  
 The Orange-boy lave us in peace,  
 The Fenian keep himself still :  
 Repalers shall drown in the sea :  
 Home Rulers shall hang when they're caught,  
 Green Erin from vermin we'll free,  
 When I'm the raal King of Connaught.

" No tears in my kingdom shall flow :  
 No sorrow shall sadden the smile !  
 No poacher to prison shall go :  
 No gauger shall darken the isle.  
 My castle—so grand it will look—  
 By all the bhoys round shall be sought ;  
 And of all the brave kings in the book  
 There'll be none like the King of Connaught.

" Av 'tis nonsense I'm talking, 'tis thrue  
 What I'm spakin', and more, too, I mane ;  
 'Tis nothing to what we shall do  
 When we get to our acres again.



Come, Biddy, your courage keep up :  
No knowin' what change may be brought ;  
We will drink—you may fill up the cup—  
To meself," said the King of Connaught.

It must not be imagined that Myles Cuolahan sang the whole of this ditty : he had not, in fact, got through more than a verse and a half when he was rudely stopped. I give it in full as the song which he would have sung had he not been interrupted, or had he remembered it ; just as in Jerusalem they point out the very identical selfsame stones which would have cried out.

What stopped him was the harsh voice of Mr. Benjamin Bastable, inviting him, with more brusqueness than was altogether polite, to "stop his row."

"Do you want to bring the whole town down upon us?" he asked, in an angry voice.

Myles looked round. There was not a human being in sight except Bastable himself, who was sitting astride of a rail at his left.

"Mighty little town I see at all," he replied good-humouredly ; "and why wouldn't we call them all together?"

"No reason," said the other, "except that we want to be quiet."

"What have you got with you?" said Myles, looking at a bag which Bastable carried. "Is it conjurin'? Is it devilry? Bastable, if you want to raise the dead, and to talk with the spirits, get some one else, for I won't help you."

"Nonsense, man. There is going to be no spirrut work at all, unless they come of their own accord, as come they will. As for that, they are always with us. Look here, what is this?" He held out his handkerchief.

"A handkerchief, isn't it? Nothing in it. Hush!" He inclined his ear, and listened as if some one was whispering to him. Myles's eye followed the movements of Bastable's head, which perhaps gave the conjuror an opportunity for a swift movement of his hands.

"Nothing in it? See, it is flat. What would you like? The spirruts shall give you whatever you ask for. An apple, is it?"

Myles had not said an apple at all; but in subsequently reporting this remarkable evidence of the supernatural, he always declared that, after carefully considering and passing in mental review everything under the broad canopy of heaven, he chose deliberately an apple.

"You choose to have an apple: you insist on having an apple, eh? Presto! behold!" and Mr. Bastable presented the astonished Irishman with an early August quaranden. "Eat it, Cuolahan. It is the gift of the spirruts. They have given you what you asked. Had it been a purse of gold you would have had it."

"Eat it! I'd sooner eat the apple of Paradise. Let me have the purse o' gould, Mr. Bastable."

"No, they do not give twice. You have lost your chance; but that shows you that there's spirruts everywhere: you can't escape 'em. They're at the back of your head now." Myles turned hastily round.

"You cannot discern them; but I can. It requires the eye of a diviner."

"Bastable, order 'em off, or I will go home at wanst. Praise the Lord, I can't see them."

"Order them! as if that would be any use. It's them that orders me. But don't be afraid, Cuolahan. No harm shall happen to you so long as you are with me."

The wretched field of rank grass owned by Paul Bayliss, over which Bastable led Myles, had nobody in it now but the geese, which set up a loud cackle at being disturbed. Bastable stopped occasionally and looked about him.

"You're not a geologist, Cuolahan, I suppose. Look at that pool, and tell me what you see."

The field had half a dozen little stagnant pools, fed by natural drains running in and out among the tiny hillocks of grass. This was one.

"See! I see a puddle."

"Yes; that's all *you* see. *I* see a pool of ferruginous colour. And I know what it means."

"Then you know more than I do; but you're a clever man, Mr. Bastable."

"You're not a botanist either, Cuolahan, of course. What do you call this flower?"

"Lord knows! 'Tis clover, likely."

"The leaves are not unlike clover; but the flower is unlike: it is, you see, white with lilac veins. This pretty flower, Cuolahan, is the oxalis, or wood-sorrel, and it grows in places where the water in the pools is ferruginous. And the pools are ferruginous in colour where——"

"Talk away," said Myles. "I believe you'd talk a donkey's hind leg off, give you time."

"Now"—Bastable stopped and looked round. It was the spot where the group in the morning made their last experiment. "Now this is the place, and here we're going to dig." There was another spade lying on the ground, and a little stick marked the spot.

"Dig, is it? All the Irish are terrible bad at digging. Like the Jews and the gipsies that way, they are. And what are we to dig for?"

Bastable took off his coat preparatory to beginning, but replied not.

"What are we to dig for? Bastable, I don't trust you. Divil a step I stir till I know what the job is. Is it burying a corpse? Then get some one else. Is it murder or robbery, or what are ye axing me to do? Bekase ye'd better get some one else."

"Don't be a fool, Cuolahan. I want to see what there is in the ground. It may be nothing; it may be coal: it may be buried treasure."

"Halves, if it's treasure," said Myles, turning up his sleeves with alacrity. "Did I ever tell you how my father dug for treasure in Pettigo Bog? Sit down now while I tell ye the finest story ye ever heard in all your life."

Bastable sat down on the blade of his spade and groaned. The sun was setting fast, there was little light before them, and the Irishman was going to begin telling a story. Little as Bastable knew of Cuolahan, he knew that nothing would stop him when he had got a story on his mind.

"You must know, thin, Mr. Bastable, that not far from



Pettigo is Lough Derg, and in Lough Derg is Station Island, and on Station Island is the entrance to St. Patrick's Purgatory. The thoughtful saint—Lord rest him!—loved the Irish so well that he got them a mighty privilege, never before granted to mortal man. They were to be allowed to see the pains of purgatory before their time came for tasting them. Wasn't that kind of the saint? My father, good man, went pilgrim wanst when he'd no work on his mind and was enjoying the profits of his last still. Bein' there, nothing would do but he must see the cavern with his own eyes. He fasted two days, and then they prayed over him and dropped him in the hole."

"Go on. Do go on," said Bastable. "It's devilish pleasant sitting on a cold spade while you tell your stories. I suppose when that one is done you've got a dozen more ready."

Myles stopped and laughed, not a whit disconcerted. Then he rose and grasped the spade.

"Never mind, Bastable," he said. "You've lost a true story that might have thrown light on this evening's job. You're the loser, not me. Now then. Halves, mind."

He struck the spade into the ground. The soil, which had never been disturbed, was a conglomerate mass of tough grass roots.

"Is it airth, or is it injy rubber?" said Myles. "Bastable, how's Paul Bayliss?" Asking this question, he began to heave and strain at his task, but the spade was blunt, and the grass tough.

"Do you know Mr. Bayliss?" asked the magician quickly.

"Do I know Esbrough? Do I know the parish pump? Many's the joyful night I've had with Paul Bayliss."

"And are you come to Esbrough to see him?"

"That depends. If Paul Bayliss wants to see me he can. I've got a message to give him, and that's all." He meant that he wanted to show him the boy, but refrained from explanation.

Bastable answered nothing, but made a great show of digging in order to stimulate his employé. He was one of those men who prefer seeing others work to working themselves.

Myles began again ; hardly with a will, because the labour of digging was new and strange to him, but with energy. He removed the turf at the surface over an area of three feet or so, and commenced turning up the soil beneath.

"How deep will this job be?"

"I don't know. Perhaps three feet ; perhaps ten. We shall go on till we reach the——what's that?"

Myles dropped the broken handle of his spade with a yell.

"Whurroo ! Christopher Columbus ! Blood and thunder ! I believe me arm's broke and spoiled for iver."

He danced about, giving the lie to his assertion by jerking the broken arm up and down.

Bastable threw himself upon the ground. The spade had struck so violently against some hard substance that the shock broke the handle in the middle. Bastable began to clear away the soil with his fingers. Not more than five inches below the surface he came upon the hard rock on which the spade had struck.

"Three shillings gone," said Myles, still rubbing his elbow. "Three shillings chucked clean away for nothing. And a pain in the elbow that beats rheumatics."

The spade had broken off a piece of the rock. This Bastable seized and examined eagerly. It was black ; it was curiously marked ; it was heavy. He took a hammer from his pocket and tried to break off another piece, but the stone was too hard and the hammer too light.

"Not six inches below the surface," he murmured. "I I'd only known it, I'd have done the job myself. Five inches, and the finest ore I ever saw. Good Lord ! Good Lord ! Here's a piece of luck !"

"What is it, Bastable ?"

The magician, looking at the piece of black rock in his hand, was trembling violently.

"If I'd only known," he murmured. "Close to the surface after all—was it the rod that knew it ? To think that Bayliss never knew and never suspected. What will he give me, and what shall I ask ? I thought it was on Perrymont's ground. Paul Bayliss, if you make your fortune, I shall

make mine as well. Nothing for nothing, in this world. Nothing for nothing, says Benjamin Bastable."

"Are ye mad, Bastable? Or are ye talking to the spirits? And what is it at all?"

He remembered the presence of Myles, and pulled himself together. Then he threw away the fragment of the rock, taking especial care to see where it fell, and picking it up again when Myles had his back turned.

"What should be the matter, Cuolahan? Only that I am disappointed. Only that we have had all our trouble for nothing. Stay, here is what I promised you for your trouble. It is little enough, but I am a poor man, and I've been disappointed. We have dug in the wrong place."

"Where's the treasure?"

"There is no treasure."

Myles looked suspicious. Then he too went on his knees and examined the spot. What he felt was rock—nothing but rock.

"If I find out," he said, sullenly rising. "If I discover that you've done me, Mr. Benjamin Bastable, as sure as my fist weighs half a hundred, I'll pound ye and smash ye. Why, it might have been a fortune for little Jack."

"Nonsense about treasure. Stay here and dig all night if you like. You are welcome to all the buried gold and silver in this ground. Stay here and dig up the whole place if you like."

"Do you feel a bit of a fool, Bastable, or do you feel a bit of a rogue?"

"Well, Cuolahan," he replied laughing, "I'm not quite sure that I feel either. However, we may as well go; or perhaps you would like to stay and dig here by yourself. It's a nice lonely place for a man to work in all night. Listen—no, it's only an owl hooting. I thought it was a dead man's cry; you do hear their cries coming up from the sea on such a coast as this. Sometimes their ghosts come ashore to stretch their legs, the poor wet spirruts of the drowned sailors. Look! is that something white moving across the field? It may be—no; I think it is only a goose. Good-night, Myles, I'm off."



Myles looked round. The place was very lonely and dismal. The night was upon them. He shook and trembled. Then he hurried on his coat with great haste.

"Wait a bit, Bastable. Shure you'd niver go to leave me alone in such a place as this. I'd rather be on the top of Slien Snaght in county Donegal. I'd as soon spend the night by Lough Ackibbon, where all the O'Donnells lie buried. Come along; don't let's wait longer than we can help."

"Stay a moment. We must cover up the spot first, and put the sod back again where we found it. There. Now no one will know anything about it."

"And why wouldn't any one know?"

"No reason in life, except that it might seem, if people did not understand things, as if we two were up to something queer digging on another man's ground. Best hide the marks, Cuolahán. And best say nothing about it. If you should see Mr. Bayliss, for instance—he mightn't like his ground searched."

"I shall say nothing," said Myles. "It's nothing to do with me. Let's get out of the field."

They walked back to the town together, Mr. Bastable keeping the lively imagination of the pedlar awake by stories of the spirit world. He narrated the most awful that he knew; and perhaps it was by deliberate choice that the scenes were laid on wild spots by the sea-shore, and in such fields as they had just left.

It was past ten o'clock when Myles returned, his imagination aglow with the stories he had heard. He had some supper; and after supper smoked a pipe, or perhaps several pipes, with a stranger from his own country. They discovered so many points of interest common to both, that it was nearly one o'clock when Myles went to bed.

Undressing slowly, and talking to himself after his wont, he put out the candle and proceeded to creep softly, so as not to wake the boy, between the sheets. Then he reached out his hand quietly to stroke Jack's cheek—his way of wishing the lad good-night—and then he suddenly became aware that the boy's place was empty.

He jumped out of bed with a bound. "Jack!" he cried. The bare walls echoed his voice, but there was no answer. "Jack!" He searched for a match and lit the candle. There was no Jack either on the bed, or under it, or on the floor. He threw on his clothes again, and hurried downstairs. The house was just shutting up, and the landlord going to bed. The boy had not been seen. Perhaps he had got into the wrong bedroom. The rooms were searched, but the boy was not in them.

Then Myles, hatless, and with terror at his heart, ran out into the street, crying aloud to the boy.

The streets of Esbrough were silent. The houses were closed and the lights put out. Myles ran round and round like a dog that looks for his master, but there was no one. He thought the boy might have lost his way, and tried to remember where he had taken him. There was the churchyard. There was no thought of ghosts in Myles's mind now, as he climbed over the wall and searched feverishly among the silent graves of the dead Armstrongs for their living heir. There was no thought of loneliness or terror of the spirits of drowned men in his mind when he sped along the road where he left the boy last, making the night resound with his cries of "Jack."

All night long he wandered and ran up and down the roads and along the shore. All night he called the boy's name. All night he wrung his hands, with tears, and weeping, and bitter self-reproach, for having left him even for a single evening. He thought of what might happen—of everything except what had happened. He never suspected that the boy had fallen into the hands of Captain Cardiff; and yet the boy's recognition of the singing beggar in the afternoon might have warned him. He ran down to the sea, as if to inquire of the silent and peaceful waves the secrets of their million murders, and to ask if they had added, that night, one murder more: he searched the red and rusty pools along the seaside fields, where the water-rat splashed: he strayed across them in case the boy might be lost and lying on the dewy grass: he went everywhere

except in that one direction whither the boy had been hurried. But he found nothing: he heard nothing. The hours slowly crept away: the moon sank at two, leaving the world in darkness: the cold air of the morning awakened at three with the first faint streaks in the east, and fanned his bare head: presently the day broke, and the sun rose, and all the world awoke, and began to hunt for food. But Myles wandered up and down: still he rushed from place to place as a thought would strike him: and still he called in vain for the boy. Had he known where the boy was, and how his night had been spent: had he, with that knowledge fresh upon him, met Captain Cardiff, it would have been bad indeed for that hero.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

**D**URING these hours little Jack was passing an unpleasant time.

The tide takes, as is well known to natural philosophers and boatmen, six hours to ebb, and something less, or something more, to flow; at least, there is always a difference of half an hour. This half-hour was introduced by Nature in order to ensure variety in the movements of the sea as well as those of the land. It would be monotonous always to have the tide at a certain time, and might be in the autumn inconvenient. What, for instance, would the lodging-house keeper of Southend, Weston-Super-Mare, or Southport do if the tide was always running out between 9 A.M. and 3 P.M., and then running in again between 3 P.M. and 9 A.M., so that the unhappy visitors never got a glimpse of the ocean at all, except in the far and misty distance? It is beautiful to think that Nature has considered, in her arrangements, even the keepers of seaside lodging-houses. "How good," I heard a clergyman preach at the very last Harvest Thanksgiving Day, "how good is the Lord, who has not only given us senses, but also the means of gratifying them!"

The tide at Esbrough, this evening, was "on the turn" at about six o'clock. It was half-past eight when Jack was



affixed to his rib. It was, as has been explained, a fat and stumpy rib, much shorter than the rest, which stood up all around it, like so many bones of a skeleton, grim and ghastly in the fading light. The cord ran round and round Jack's body, beginning with his feet: his hands were tied down straight to his sides; his legs were bound to the wood: his feet resting on a ten-inch nail, already mentioned. Only his head was free. This he might turn about, and did, looking now upon the waste of waters behind him, and now upon the sand and mud fast disappearing before him.

When he was first bound the mud was already soft with the rising tide: Captain Cardiff's weight upon the old keel, as has been already explained, caused it to move and shake in the black ooze which had been its bed so long. A quarter of an hour after the boy was left to himself the water was lapping about the ribs of the wreck, and the mud had disappeared. Now and then a wavelet a little higher than the rest washed over the boy's shoes and wetted his feet: it was not long before the feet were in the water and the wavelets creeping slowly up his legs.

Jack's face was turned to the west, where the sunset piled masses of gorgeous colour in red and gold, sapphire, green, and yellow. There were hills, the hills of Durham, behind and over which the painted skies spread like a canopy. There are not many places in England where you can see the sun set over distant hills with a stretch of sea between. At Esbrough you can see it; and as you sit upon the beach and watch the unwonted effect, your memory goes back to times long past when you watched the morning break, or the evening fall, over hills that took a thousand hues, beyond a sea like a fairy lake for the splendour and the glory of its colouring. You remember those islands in the Indian Ocean over which you once saw the sun decline and set, when the *cocos de mer*, which grew to the water's edge, and in it, gradually changed from green to black and merged into the land, while the sky overhead glorified the hill-tops and wrought a marvellous transformation scene, more wonderful than painter ever dreamed of or essayed for Drury Lane.

What did the boy think about? He had no memories of Indian islands: he knew nothing of the splendour of sunsets: he only knew that he was tied up there to die. Death—what was death? He had seen poor Biddy Cuolahan lay her head back upon the pillow, as if tired with the day's march, and close her eyes. Then he was told that Biddy Cuolahan was dead. Now he was himself to die. He comprehended that he was to wait, without the power of motion, while the tide rose higher and higher, until it should rise above his head and drown him; the Captain, meantime, he also knew, was lying on the shore, waiting for him to scream—a thing which would delight him beyond measure. Then the Captain would laugh; but he should not scream.

Death! The word conveyed to the boy no terrors, because he had had no religious training. Boys and savages are not afraid of dying, unless the dangers and possible unpleasantness of the after-time are pointed out to them. The Tahiti native used to go off like a lamb, until the missionary converted him. Now he goes off like a stuck pig. Such is the power of his religion.

Jack was going to die. He thought that he should never see Myles any more, and the tears began to come into his eyes. A vague horror of the future was in his mind: the cord hurt his limbs: but he would not scream. Nothing should make him scream.

The water was up to his knees: the sun was set: the colour was fading in the west. Where was Myles? Oh! for only five minutes of that strong arm and that enormous right hand. On the shore, just where the reedy grass grew above the high-water line, the boy could see, growing every moment more dim, the figure of Captain Cardiff; that is, he knew where the Captain lay, and he could see the soles of his boots—a black pair of objects like a binocle—staring straight at him. Yes, nothing was visible of his enemy but the soles of his boots. That a human body can be reduced to mere soles, seen from any possible point of view, may at first be doubted; nor should I have ventured to state the fact unsupported by other evidence. This I obtained only yesterday in St. James's

Park, where I observed two boys lying side by side upon the wet grass. One presented the usual foreshortened appearance: of the other I could catch nothing but the soles of his feet—a small matter, but it is well to be accurate.

Then Jack thought—how if he could break his bonds and be free. Alas! he could not. With all his endeavours he succeeded in nothing more than freeing the fingers of his right hand, and when he tried more, the cruel cord cut into his flesh. His neck was tied up so fast that he could not move his head to bite the string.

And the water rose higher and higher.

Meantime the Captain, tired with his day's march, weary, too, of waiting for the tide, which came up with such irritating slowness, to drown the boy, smoked pipe after pipe of tobacco, and applied to his lips a dozen times a short, fat bottle, in which was rum. Each pipe made him more tired and indignant at the tedious flow of ocean—each application of the bottle made him fiercer and more cruel. Presently, however, a pleasing disposition to slumber crept over him. It was a warm night, just the night for camping out; he laid his head back, forgot his wrongs, forgot his murderous purpose, forgot the boy he had doomed to lingering tortures, and fairly went off to sleep. So he lost the sweetness and the full flavour of his revenge. Forgive the frailty of the Captain. Consider he had been upon the road all day—he had been singing a psalm tune, at a slow pace, through the streets of Esbrough—he had had a very, very inferior dinner, and the rum, for which he had given his last pence, was a common and even an adulterated spirit: moreover, the excitement of his chase, the agitation of spirits into which the capture threw him, the rare and novel joy of punishing a traitor—all these things taken together may excuse the Captain for failing in his high resolve, and leaving his victim to perish unheeded. He forgot the boy, and went to sleep. When Saul threw that javelin, remarking, "I will smite David even to the wall with it," I am certain that if it had transfixed the Psalmist, and so have preserved the life of Uriah, while it deprived the English service of her chaunts, the king would have instantly called



for another cup of Gaza wine—a rich and fruity, but heady drink—and would then have gone to sleep with the tranquillity of Moses. In the morning on awaking he would have repented. It would have been too late. The unfortunate property of repentance is, that it always is too late.

The water was up to the boy's middle; but the Captain slept upon his back, and dreamed away the hours like an innocent child. Presently there came to his side, and sat by his ear, two wild creatures of the wood; no others, indeed, than the marten and the stoat, who, being out for a moonlight stroll, met beside the sleeping man, and made the *rencontre*, under these interesting circumstances, an excuse for reconciliation, after an estrangement of many moons.

"It is a man," whispered the marten, with a natural recoil—"a man, my friend."

"Probably a drowned man, like the last I saw along here," said the stoat. "No—he moves—he is asleep. Do not touch him."

They walked round and round him. Presently they came upon something lying on the ground—in fact, the Captain's pipe.

"Hush! What is that?" said the stoat.

They both crept cautiously to the object, and the marten, who was first, smelt it, putting his nose well into the bowl.

"Cr—r—sh. Ah! Pah! Ps—s—sh."

"What is it?"

"What is it! It's enough to make a stoat sick," said the marten.

"What do you mean by that?" cried the stoat, offended at the innuendo.

"Oh dear!—it has made me feel so ill! My friend, what should I mean? It it made me sick, how much rather a creature of your delicacy and refinement?"

"Humph!" said the stoat. "And what is that other thing?"

"Smell it yourself," said the marten.

It was the rum-bottle, now empty, and lying without the cork. The stoat smelt it cautiously. Then he, too, coughed and swore.

"It is worse than the other thing," he said. "Men ought, every one of them, to be exterminated."

"Ah!" cried the marten, grinning at the other's suffering, "my poor friend, how I pity you! But I expected it. Always some new dam foolishness. My dear fellow, let us go on."

So they left him, and the night was very black and lonely.

Now the waves were up to Jack's waist, and he was cold, although the water in those shallow shores was tepid. Still he would not cry out. He looked across the waste of waters to the ocean, and there was no boat, no sign of any help; he looked to the shore, and even Captain Cardiff's boots were no longer to be discerned. A long black line marked the low lying coast; behind it rose the dark hill on which the black pines stood up like so many inflexible watchers of his doom. There was no longer any light in the west, but a pale fringe of greenish grey above the distant darkness of the hills. The water rose higher, creeping slowly up his body. Above him were the stars, and presently the clouds floated from her face and showed the bright moon—one more eye to see, helpless to save him from his fate.

Yet the boy was not frightened. Somehow he had faith. Perhaps Myles would come—perhaps the sea would go down—somehow or other he would be rescued. He might break his bonds—a boat might pass along. Happen what might, he would not cry out. The only thing which made his courage droop was the feeling that his murderer had left him to die alone. Had the man been on the bank yelling taunts and imprecations, his voice would have roused the boy to fresh courage of resistance.

He listened—there was nothing—only the plaintive note of the curlew calling to his mate with his monosyllabic whistle, and being answered in return—only the sandpiper's shrill cry of "Willy wicket"—only the heavy flight of the cormorants—only the flap of a fish upon the water; but from the shore no sign, and the water rising higher.

The cords which bound him were like so many bars of red-hot iron, and between the bars there was no feeling at all save of cold and numbness. Fortunate for him that the

season had been a warm one. He kept thinking of Myles. What was Myles doing now? Was he in bed? Was he searching for him? Could he, even now, be running across the fields, ready to plunge into the water and cut his cruel cords? Alas! Myles was running aimlessly up and down the road half a mile away, crying the boy's name upon the unheeding breeze.

Then Jack became aware that the water was creeping over his chin, and was wetting his lower lip, and he moaned, still resolute not to cry out, because he plainly perceived that what the man said he purposed, and that he was tied up there to die. But he would not cry out. He did not know whether it would be painful to die; the agony of his last struggles seemed still as far from him as when he was tied up first, though it was now close at hand; he only knew that he was alone, deserted, helpless, and going to die. And strange thoughts crossed the poor ignorant boy's mind of what it meant, this death, and how he should feel when he was placed in the black box, and put away under the ground. But his chief thought was Myles—Myles and Norah—what Myles would do without him—how Norah would miss him when she grew up—whether they would talk about him—whether they would ever find out what had become of him, and who had done the deed; and, lastly, what vengeance Myles, in his wrath, would wreak upon the Captain. Jack, with his teeth chattering and his limbs aching, would have thought a little more to the same effect, but that a sudden and wonderful thing happened.

The wreck was that of a small shore-going schooner, partly running backwards and forwards in the potato trade, partly used, in the season, for fishing. Many of her ribs being gone, all her beams, and some of her keel, the additional weight of the Captain when he tied up the boy loosened the bed of mud on which she lay. The boy's weight was not much; but that, too, helped the water in widening the displacement. As a matter of fact, not only had the tide been rising, but Jack had been sinking slowly backwards. Just as the water reached the boy's chin the old wreck gave a hollow groan, which



startled their five wits out of all the eels, and made them think the day of universal eel-forking, so long prophesied by the gloomy, was come at last, so that there was nothing left but to cry out, with Balbus, that it was all over with the republic. Gave a tremendous groan, the old wreck, and with a sudden plunge upwards of all her remaining ribs, turned half over, and soused Jack for a moment completely under water. Only for a moment, because a broken piece of keel, to which was attached a spare rib or so, was lying across the opposite side of the wreck; and making their weight felt, in accordance with the laws of hydrostatics, brought the equilibrium of the wreck to a position better calculated to keep Jack alive; lifting him, indeed, almost out of the water. This done, the enfranchised wreck, with a dim reminiscence of former days, when she walked the waters like a thing of life, very slowly began to float, with the turning tide, out to sea.

The breeze freshened as the early August morning began to dawn, and Jack's wet clothes felt bitterly cold and chill as it blew upon him. But he was grateful, so far, that every breeze that struck him, and pierced the marrow of his bones with cold, blew him farther from the land and farther from his enemy. Upon the shore lay the Captain—while the boy upon the wreck had drifted far down the coast, and out of sight—turned upon his face, sleeping off the day's excitement and the contents of the black bottle; while Myles was wandering still up and down the deserted and silent roads, looking, crying, shouting for the boy.

It was broad daylight, and the sun had risen, when the Captain awoke and began to wonder, like the intelligent infant with regard to the twinkling star, what and where he was. First, he was wet with dew, and horribly cold; so he drew up his feet and sat up with a preliminary damn, looking nervously round him. Next there were ants, earwigs, and other noisome insects about his hair, ears, and neck: some of these he slew, some he shook off, and some, stricken with mortal terror, fled to more congenial retreats. Then he felt hungry, having had no other supper than the rum, but there was nothing to eat; so he swore again, and tightened his

belt : then he thought of his bottle, but it was empty, and he swore a third time. Then he discovered that the night air had given him a cold ; then he sneezed, and swore even more vehemently : then he remembered his pipe, but there was no tobacco left, and he had broken the pipe ; so he swore once more, only feebly. Lastly, he staggered to his feet, and began to yawn, just like the most innocent man in the world. Note that the yawn proper belongs exclusively to the mind at rest and the unburdened conscience. Your habitual criminal, for instance, may yawn his valuable life away, because his conscience is seared as with a hot flat-iron ; your occasional sinner hardly ever, save when he has succeeded by the aid of drink in lulling the pangs of conscience. Captain Cardiff began a most creditable early-boyhood kind of yawn, but stopped in the middle, nearly dislocating his lower jaw by the violent check to the muscles which at the moment were slowly assisting in effecting the fullest possible expansion of his mouth. For he suddenly remembered the boy, and he stopped yawning. All his thoughts swept back in a flood to the doings of the night, and he turned upon the sea, with a sickness at his heart, to look for the child. *He was gone !* The tide was out—completely out. Beyond the sand lay the mud ; beyond the mud was the sea ; but the tide was out. Where the wreck had stood there was no wreck ; it was clean gone, and the boy was gone with it. The Captain bent forward, staring with an expression which had all the horror and all the fear that nature permitted to his face. Then he rushed to the edge of the sand ; then he tore off his boots, and waded out knee-deep in the mud to where the wreck had been. There was nothing now to see, not a sign. He walked ashore again in dire terror and perplexity. It was a dream, he thought ; all a horrid dream of blind rage and revenge. There was no wreck ; he had been drinking. He had met no boy ; it was the rum and the vapour of a brain overladen with bad spirits, and a stomach empty of all good meat. A dream—nothing but a dream.

A dream ! What else could it be ? He looked round. Bright day ; the sun in the sky ; the birds flying about ; no sign of any wreck at all—a dream of the night.

He waded through the mud to the sand, and walked across the sand to the grass, where he cleaned his feet, and put on his boots again. Did he not remember, or was that also a dream, the boy unlacing his boots for him?

A very curious and remarkable dream; so full and precise in all its details, too. Why, he remembered, as if he had actually done it, dragging the boy across the lonely fields, and tying him to the ribs of the old fishing-smack. But yet a dream. For there was no fishing-smack at all, and no wreck. A blessed thing to think it was but a dream.

Little Jack, the boy who by some word or foolish talk of his, got him sent to prison for six months, and Myles Cuolahan, the Irish hawker, what should they be doing in Esbrough? It was out of Cuolahan's beat. There was no reason why he should come there at all. Clearly a dream. Only a dream.

It was all very real, in his mind. He remembered making the boy unlace his boots; he remembered carrying him across the mud; he remembered tying him to the wreck—here he felt in his pocket for the string, and not finding it, perceived a sudden sinking at the heart. He remembered even flicking his fingers in the face of the child. Here he looked at his fingers to see if they, at least, were still, so to speak, on hand. He remembered wading ashore, and then his memory stopped. Truly, a curious and wonderful dream, as strange as the dream of Belshazzar. There was no Daniel handy, or the prophet would have explained things to him as he did to the Assyrian monarch.

Aha! only a dream—only a . . . . Here his feet kicked against something. He picked it up. It was a shoe, and on the leather of the shoe, inside, was written the name Jack. Was this a dream? No; it was no dream. Nor had the murder of the night been a dream. It was real; it was true. It was the bitter reality. He had killed the boy!

Captain Cardiff stood like one from whom all hope has fled. His white face had no other expression than that of despair. He was another Cain; he was a murderer. He had committed every kind of wickedness, including those of which the law takes strict cognisance, and those which it passes over. He



was Past-Master, Right Worshipful Grand, *Frère Vénérable*, in every kind of vice. No allusion could escape his wicked ears; no reading between the lines was impossible for him. There was nothing that he did not understand. But like most criminals, all but the very few, the elect and chosen of Satan's army, he drew the line at murder. He had taken no man's life.

Now he had done it. He began to run up and down the shore seeking—for what? For the body. He should find, he thought, the body of the poor, pretty, curly-headed boy lying stiff and stark upon the shore, rolled over and over by the waves. He forgot that the boy was tied so tightly that he could not get away from the wreck. That escaped him; and so he ran up and down as restlessly, and even more miserably, than Myles Cuolahan. But there was no body lying on the shore. The boy was not there. Every bolster of green seaweed, matted and rolled up together, filled with shells, cuttle-fish, bits of stick, all the flotsam that lies upon the sea-shore, filled him with terror. But the boy was not there.

The morning grew on; the sun mounted higher; it was already six o'clock. The man sat down, his head upon his hands, thinking—brooding. He did not swear, things were too serious; he only stared out seawards, and now and then, struck with a sudden thought, darted along the shore, to search in some spot which he might have overlooked. No corpse was to be seen. A corpse might be hidden, buried, anything. But there was no corpse. Where was the murdered child?

It would be found; the drowned body would be found. Men would come down from London; they would bring the murder home to him; they would catch him; they would hang him. The everlasting fire awoke in his breast, the fire of guilt which men never forgive. Of all other sins a man may unburden his soul, and take comfort and forgiveness thereafter; but the sin of blood affords no escape for the penitent. The pardon and peace of the next world may be his, but not those of the present world.

So, clasping his hands to his forehead, the miserable man rushed from the spot with a groan, and fled inland. Had he

looked back when he reached the top of the knoll where the pine-trees stood, he would have seen a sight that might have changed the current of his thoughts for many a long year after. Out at sea was a fishing-boat. Her sail was lowered; she was lying alongside a floating wreck, or the skeleton of a wreck; on the wreck, a senseless boy, lashed and bound tightly. Cold, sleeplessness, and pain had worked their will upon poor little Jack, and he felt them no longer. As he lay, his head drooping low on his shoulder, his feet sometimes in and sometimes out of the water, his long eyelashes rested motionless on his cheek, his brown curls were damp, and lay like carved-work upon his head; his lips were set together, as if resolved not to cry out, whatever happened. As the gentle motion of the sea rocked the craft, a cruel nail in the rib tore his bleeding neck; but Jack felt nothing, and but for the slightest motion of the nostril, you might have thought him dead.

"Good God A'mighty in heaven!" said the boss boatman, who was a religious man, so that the ejaculation meant a good deal more than the usual nautical expressions of surprise, though these are sometimes stronger.

Then, with the help of his crew, which consisted of his daughter, who held the tiller, and his son, who navigated the craft and managed the nets, he cut the cord, and lifted the motionless boy into the boat, where he laid him on his own coat in the sun.

"Here," he said, "is a pretty piece of villainy! Bess, my girl, undress him quick. Take off them wet things."

In a moment they had him as naked as Dame Nature herself. His fair and comely limbs were ribbed with red lines and weals where the string crossed and recrossed; his shoulders were covered with blood from the wound in his neck; his eyes were shut, and he made no sign.

"Now who, in the name o' God, done this?" said the boatman.

He produced a bottle from the locker, and rubbed a little rum on the boy's lips, while the girl, crying silently, chafed his hands and feet. The boat lay almost motionless upon

the water, which lapped musically against her sides. The wreck was drifting away anywhere, having now done all its appointed work in the world; and the hot sun beat fiercely down upon the cold figure of the child.

Presently Jack opened his eyes and looked feebly round.

"That's brave, my boy," said the boatman. "Now we'll bring you round. Bess, my gal! Why, Bess"—

But Bess was gone "for'ard," where, under cover of the sail, she was engaged in stripping off her own flannel petticoat. This she wrapped round the boy, and laying his head upon her lap, kissed him through her tears. It was a thoughtful and a timely deed. Some girls would have borrowed their father's jacket; some might have lent a shawl; Bess—who was subsequently rewarded by Providence with a good husband and a baker's dozen of healthy children—knew better. A yard of flannel was worth, at this juncture, a thousand conventionalities.

"Home, father," she said, laying the "hellum," as she called it, hard-a-port; "home, father."

The two men rowed, because what little wind there was blew off the shore.

It was between six and seven that Myles, still wandering up and down in a despair now too deep for words, heard a cry, feeble but familiar, "Myles!" This was followed by a chorus, a three-part glee, consisting of treble, tenor, and bass. They sang the most delightful song he ever heard in all his life—"Myles Cuolahan, we've found Jack! Myles, Jack's safe! Myles, we've brought him back!" Jack it was who saw Myles on the shore, and told his name. "Say 'Myles,'" he whispered, "then he'll know that it's all right."

"Myles, we've found your Jack!"

It was a barefooted and bareheaded girl, who came running along the path, crying and laughing. She was the treble voice of the chorus—a rosy-cheeked, bronzed, and bright-eyed girl of sixteen, with a figure which a young duchess would have envied, and arms which only wanted to be white to be the pride of any ball-room.

Myles would not have been himself had he not, after



getting the boy on land—he cried over him, kissed him, and carried on in a manner far too ridiculous for any historian to notice—turned to the girl and kissed her too.

“And what will I do with you at all, Jack?” said Myles, sitting by the bedside, when the boy was able to sit up again, and had got through his long fever and delirium. “What will I do with you? You can’t walk with me, and I must go. I can’t leave you by yourself, for fear of Cardiff Jack—When I catch him!—You can’t go on the tramp with me, and I must go on the tramp again, for the money’s all gone, and there’s a week’s rint; and only that the landlady is a good, kind soul, and doesn’t mind trusting a honest man, where would we be? What will I do with you, Jack? and oh! Lord, Lord! what will I do without you?”

“Myles,” said the boy, “if you have to set off without me, promise one thing—Myles, remember the blessed pledge.”

Myles took the medal out of his pocket, and gazed at it with a look that began by being pathetic and ended by being intense.

“The drink, is it, Jack? Didn’t I tell ye, six months ago and more, how every public-house had ropes, ropes that ye can’t see, dragging me to the doors; and how to break away from thim ropes was like taking the pledge again, and beginning it all over again? The ropes has got into the whipcord, Jack, and the whipcord has got into threads since you were with me and I had some one to talk with of a night, when my troubles used to come upon me all of a heap and together for the want of the blessed whisky.”

“Not blessed, Myles.”

“Yes, Jack, blessed it is, pledge or not. Blessed for them as can finish the day with a glass, or may be two, dacent and comfortable: cursed whisky for them, like me and your poor . . . like others as is dead and gone—God rest their sowl—that can’t touch it without a fresh devil flying into their sowl with every glass, and cryin’ out for more. Pledge is it? Take you the pledge, Jack, and keep it for me, for I never want to see it again, now I have got you back again. And the Lord be with me so long as I keep my new pledge that I’m going to make. Jack, the first was to Father Mathew,

who's dead now and buried, and broken the pledge he tuk in the blessed drink of heaven. It was for my own sake, all for my own miserable, selfish sake, now it's for yours—yours and Norah's. Hear me, Jack. I'll niver touch a drop of drink again, and save all the money that should have gone in it for you and Norah, so help me, God! That's the new pledge, Jack."

He handed the medal to the boy, who put it under his pillow, and looked up and laughed at him. It was one of the ways of this boy that he always looked you in the face and laughed. There are many different ways of laughing; but the sweetest, truest, brightest laugh of all is the laugh of trust. And that you can only get in the child that knows your truth, and the woman who knows your love. So Jack looked up in Myles's face and laughed, and Myles looked down in his, and kissed him with eyes that filled.

"But what will I do with you, Jack?" he repeated, mopping up. "Would you like to go to his riverence for a while—Misther—bedad! I've forgotten his name, but it's easy to find it out—who wanted to have you before? Maybe he'd take you for a bit. Will we try, Jack, asthore?"

But Jack, whose strength was but weakness yet, had fallen back upon the pillow, and was gone to sleep.

Myles took violent measures. He borrowed a sovereign from the landlady, leaving his silver watch in pledge, and bought a wheelbarrow. Into this he lifted Jack, and wheeled him the whole ten miles to Mr. Fortescue's parsonage. They found the clergyman standing on his lawn, book in hand. He was surprised, but evidently pleased to see them. Myles hastened to explain.

"Jack's been ill, sir, but is better, and—and—I thought I'd take some of your riverence's offer, and bring him back."

"You will let me have the boy?" cried Mr. Fortescue. "My child, will you stay here with me, and be taught?"

They took him in, and put him to bed. And that night Mr. Fortescue and Myles had a long talk in the garden.

"Then, my friend," concluded the clergyman, "we are agreed in this, that the boy shall be put under my care, and educated to be a gentleman, as his fathers were. If I die, he

shall not be in want, provided that he turns out as I desire, and shall pray. Believe me, it is better so. No," he added, as Myles was about to speak, "he shall not be wholly separated from you. He shall never be prevented from seeing you whenever you come this way."

"Maybe he'll grow up ashamed of me," said poor Myles humbly.

"Nay, that he shall not. And—and—one thing more, my friend. The Christian religion teaches us to forgive our enemies. Renounce your project of revenge upon that bad man. Forgive him, Mr. Cuolahan."

"I will, your riverence," said Myles; "I will, indeed—as soon as I've broken the biggest stick I can find across his back. I never was the boy to bear malice, and after I've thrashed my enemy, I always forgive him till the next time."

In the morning Myles went away early, before Jack was awakened. He could not trust himself to say good-bye. But he had a last conversation with the housekeeper before leaving the house, and was not aware, when he parted from her in the porch, that the clergyman, who was an early riser, was watching him from the garden gate.

"Mr. Cuolahan," said he, as he opened the gate for him, "one word more. Is it your custom always to—to—to KISS the housekeeper?"

He pronounced the verb with considerable difficulty, as if it was a forgotten word, and one to be recalled with an effort. Myles looked at him with a twinkle in his eye.

"They like being butthered, your riverence. And faith! it's sometimes, maybe, I like buttherin' them."

In his excitement Myles forgot Paul Bayliss altogether. So that Cardiff Jack's revenge was the cause of many things. First, that Jack Armstrong was not introduced, at what proved a critical moment, to his father's partner; secondly, that the man who had the revenge for which his soul lusted was wandering in an agony of terror lest the thing should be discovered and himself hanged; and, thirdly, that Jack Armstrong was taken off the road, and educated to be a gentleman, like his fathers before him.



## *PART THE SECOND.*

### CHAPTER I.

**T**WELVE years—the fourth part of a working life, time to change a child into a man—have passed since Jack was tied to the wreck by Captain Cardiff. If the years have made a difference in the boy, they have done more for the town of Esbrough. It had been a sleepy little market town; it is now a great manufacturing centre. The lanes, narrow, winding, hedged with honeysuckle, have become streets, mostly mean, dismal, uniform, for the “hands.” Where the waves ran along the lone line of shore stand docks with stately ships. There are half a dozen ecclesiastical edifices, brand new, in addition to the old parish clock built by the Armstrongs. There is the church with the spire, where the vicar of the newly-made district bars off the chancel from the nave, so as to keep up the Anglican figment of laity and priesthood, and every Sunday brings up the rear of a grand procession of twelve, marching two and two, from the vestry, a distance of at least ten feet, to their seats in the choir. There is also the barn of brick, in which something is preached every Sunday which is loud, fierce, and satisfying, and gives unfeigned pleasure to an overflowing congregation. There is a broad new street, much grander and finer than the old High Street of Esbrough, just as Oxford Street supplanted High Street, Holborn. Here shops, as good as any in London, supply the Esbrough ladies with those superfluities of life, in the shape of dainty decorations, which were unknown to their mothers.

Esbrough has become a power in the land—it rivals Barrow-in-Furness; it has outstripped Darlington, and left it far

behind ; it is courted by banks ; it is respected by commercial travellers ; and it is considered, for thirty miles round at least, as a Tom Tiddler's ground, where pushing lads who want to pick up gold have only to go and push and to find. In a certain sense the belief is founded on fact, because if you stoop you may pick up iron ; and the transmutation of metals is no longer a secret for Esbrough people. Esbrough is the English Chicago.

One man has done it all. He is the king of the town, the leader of the enterprise ; he is the newly-made mayor, the founder of all the new institutions, the chief support of all the new charities, the chairman of all the new committees—everything in Esbrough is of yesterday. He is Paul Bayliss—once the unlucky Paul—who has been many things, and failed in all, who is now the great and successful Paul. You may see him in his carriage, driving from his house to the works, any morning. With one consent the people take off their hats to him. If any fail in this mark of reverence, it is considered a proof of bad breeding. Strangers and visitors are taken out in the morning to be shown the local great man ; they are also invited to join in the general custom of taking off their hats. Commercial travellers, who are, as a body, ever ready to acknowledge the greatness of success, salute King Bayliss with the unction of sincerity.

Captain Perrymont, who employs nearly as many hands, and is supposed to be nearly as rich, does not meet with the same outward tokens of respect. The reasons are obvious. Bayliss belongs to the people, Perrymont belongs to the land. Bayliss has risen from themselves, Perrymont rose from another level. Bayliss is rough, genial, and hearty ; Perrymont is reserved. Bayliss is open-handed and generous ; Perrymont gives rarely, though he gives large sums. Bayliss, if rough and rude of speech, if ostentatious of his wealth, is always in evidence as the rich and successful man. He drives in his carriage, while Perrymont prefers to walk. Captain Perrymont is courteous, delicate in his phrases, sensitive of nature, polite to his employés ; but he is as unapproachable as when he was on full pay and in command of a three-decker. Bayliss

will swear at a man one moment and ask him to dinner the next; he will abuse a clerk like a pickpocket, and then, finding that he is himself in fault, will send him a cheque. Perrymont considers his people as the crew of his ship; they are paid and must do their duty. But he pays his people well, and he is better served than Bayliss. He forms his own plan of social economy, and refuses to listen to the law of supply and demand. His establishment could at any time be reduced by five-and twenty per cent.; but Perrymont pays what he thinks is just and right. Yet he is not popular, for he is not known. Men as they are, and as they seem to be, are often twain. Bayliss, who shows so generous, charitable, religious, bluff, and hearty, is selfish, greedy, vain, and sensual. Perrymont, who has always led a secluded life, has acquired the faults of secluded men, in that he hides himself. No one knows, not even his son, the warm nature of the man. In his heart lies a whole bank full of possibilities, never drawn upon, because men do not suspect them. He does not give to the things which Bayliss supports, not because he is avaricious, but because the objects seem to him unworthy. He does not mix with the people round him, because their thoughts are not his, and because his pursuits, which a certain day at Bastable's may have taught us, are such as the common herd have no sympathy with. Bayliss founded his popularity on the discovery that promises cost nothing, that fine words butter all sorts of sugarless cakes, and make them palatable, and that, if you want a man to serve you honestly you must praise him. Perrymont was of a nature most likely to mount higher, Bayliss of a nature most likely to sink lower.

Twelve years ago, was there a more unlucky, despairing creature in the world than Paul Bayliss? Poor Johnny Armstrong's money brought no prosperity to the scrap-iron factory. The rent-days had to be met, the daily expenses had to be found. Paul Bayliss sat all day in a draughty office with pen and paper before him, trying to make out that two and three make ten. In the evening he went home to a peevish wife, who mistook a fretful temper for the legitimate outcome of disappointment, and put the complaints which



kept her to a couch on the back of the unlucky factory. With her, equally peevish, but more spiteful, sat his sister, whose little fortune was swallowed up as well. The end of the struggle seemed very near. But for the sake of his little child, Paul Bayliss cared nothing when it came.

Now the peevish wife and the snappish sister had carried their fretfulness and ill-temper to a better world—perhaps got rid of them there as a useless encumbrance. The little child, his daughter Ella, was a young lady of nineteen, the one thing in the world that he loved beside himself, the sole weak point in what was else a panoply of selfishness, proof against arrow or shot of culverin. The poverty, gone like a dream, was forgotten, save in the wakeful watches of the night, when the voice of reality makes itself heard, and we see ourselves, what we are, and what we have been, in all the unlovely truth. We live in the sweet world of imagination, lapped by the soft waves of fancy, cradled and lulled by the thoughts which show us as we wish ourselves to seem. Then a wakeful night comes upon us, a casual speech from a candid friend shakes us rudely from our dreaming, the veils fall from us, the coloured lights fade away, and the white sunshine pours in upon the soul. Heavens! can yonder figure, smirched with mud, halt and maim, purblind and groping, mopping and mowing, a hunchback making believe to be an Apollo—can this be the self of our contented imagination?

The poverty gone, that was the great thing; wealth—such wealth as even a great brewer, or a great coal owner, or a great landed lord might desire and envy—in place of grinding debt and an empty purse. Real wealth—not the gaudy bubble of a financial speculation—hard money for work done, and for solid metal sold—no possible fatal chance that might cause the whole to collapse like a house of cards—all solid, growing, tangible wealth—an income steady, increasing, dependent on a demand as certain as the growth of military armaments, naval developments, and other proofs of advancing civilisation—also on a supply which seemed as inexhaustible as the bowels of the earth. The savings and investments grew year by year; the property became daily more valuable;

men looked upon the lucky Bayliss with awe, as upon one chosen specially. What is before a man so rich? England's fountain of honour wells out plentifully at his feet. He shall be knight, baronet, peer, according as he has audacity to ask or ambition to hope.

How was it done? You remember the stroke of Myles's spade, how it split upon the rock six inches below the surface—that stroke was the foundation of Paul Bayliss's fortune. Bastable went the next morning to the tumbledown factory where Bayliss sat, as usual, with the impossible sum in arithmetic before him. It was a weariness to him, contriving how a sum might be pared off here and saved there, and how, when all was done, he only got the deeper in the mire. How did life feel to those who were not so "sair hadden doun" by an adverse fortune? He looked up and saw the man who had yesterday played the fool with a rod over the field. Bastable pulled a chair to the table and sat down.

"You know me," he said. "I am an assayer of metals, as well as a mesmerist. You saw me yesterday with Captain Perrymont. We surveyed your field. I am also a diviner, and am one of the few men living who understand how to call and control the spirruts."

Bayliss waved his hand impatiently. "Tut, tut, man," he cried; "don't come here with your blather about spirruts. I have got something else to do. There; good morning."

"Wait a bit. I am also a mineralogist and a geologist. I am going to make your fortune, Mr. Bayliss."

"My word!" said Paul, thinking some spiritualistic trick was coming; "that's more than I can do for myself. Go on, my lad."

"Have you ever thought, in your factory here, how it would be if you were working your own iron? Stay; don't take the trouble to answer. Have you ever considered what might be made if you had command of the raw material, close to hand, your own for the digging?"

He spoke hurriedly, and then he pulled himself up short, for he thought he had gone too far. Paul Bayliss stared. It took some time to awaken him from the torpor that

long-continued unsuccess, like long frost, produces in the brain.

"Have I thought?" he echoed. "Have I lain awake at night and dreamed impossible things? Get to the point, man."

"The point, as it always is," said Bastable, "is . . . how much? What is to be my share? I am not going to ask for a large sum. You are welcome to make money as fast as you like. For myself, I am tired of England; tired of my life here—tired, if you must know, of my wife—and I want to go away and have done with it. In California, or in Australia, there are metals worth a man's trying for; better than all your iron mines round here."

"What iron mines round here?"

"Not yet—not yet; but *there will be*. Now, how much?"

Bayliss began to think there might be something in it.

"You ask before you give," he said.

"Ay!" replied Bastable. "He is a fool who gives before he asks. I give nothing; I sell. You are not asked to give, but to buy. How much?"

"How the devil am I to know how much, unless I know the secret?" asked the other impatiently.

"See here, then," replied Bastable, producing a paper. "Here is an agreement by which you promise that if the secret I shall give you is worth twenty thousand pounds, you will give me, or arrange for me to draw upon you, as soon as you are convinced of it, three thousand."

"I haven't a penny to give a beggar," replied Bayliss.

"That doesn't matter. You will soon have plenty of pennies. Call a witness—two witnesses—and sign."

Bayliss went out—it was a sign of his poverty that he had not even a clerk to call—and brought in his foreman and a hand to witness his signature. The signature, at least, could bring no harm upon him. Then Bastable communicated his information.

On Paul Bayliss's land—that waste piece of marshy meadow which had been Johnny Armstrong's last strip of hereditary territory, where his paltry flock of geese fed, out of whom he hoped to make a miserable pound or two—only a foot beneath



the surface, lay a vein of the richest ironstone the country had to show. How deep it lay, how far it stretched, was as yet uncertain. But there it was; all his own, lying in his own field, with no one to gainsay his right to dig.

"And nowhere else?" asked Bayliss, breathless. "Nowhere else? Is there none on Captain Perrymont's land?"

"I suppose the vein runs both ways," replied Bastable. "Indeed, it must; but how far down we cannot say. Meantime, there is yours. I *could* show you iron elsewhere, but it would be no use to you, not being on your own land."

Bayliss absolutely gasped. Iron somewhere else that no one knew of! Bastable was a clever man, but he had not been brought up to business, and here his astuteness failed him. After all, he was not a Yorkshireman born.

"Tell me where it is elsewhere," he said; "that is, if you like."

"No objection at all to tell you," replied Bastable, thinking of his three thousand pounds. "Look; this is a map of Ravendale county. I've walked all over this district with a hammer in my hand. I've made discoveries. Here, for instance: this is in the cliff, you know, at Revenburn-by-the-Sea; the iron crops up at the surface. The property belongs to——"

"Ah, never mind," said Bayliss impatiently. "Go on; go on. Never mind the details."

"Well, then, here again, also by the sea, only you would have to tunnel under it; and here, four miles away, just behind the old farmhouse that I've marked in the map."

"And why haven't you sold this information too?"

"Because they know it already."

Bayliss's face dropped. "They know it already—the dolts! the donkeys! the idiots!—and they won't work it. They haven't the spirit to pick up the fortune that is lying at their feet when it only wants a few thousands to work it. I've tried them. They refuse to touch it: they like to go on in their old-fashioned way."

It seems incredible, but all this was possible only twenty years ago. Bayliss had got hold of the map now, and was poring over it in an earnest, excited way.

"It's no use to you," he said carelessly; "you may as well leave it with me;" and tossed the map, as if not caring much about it, on a table beside him. "Come with me now, and show me where the iron is on my ground."

Bastable left the map with him, and they walked away to the spot where he had found the iron the day before. Bayliss was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet when the chance, long wished for, came at length. Nor was he one to let things out before their time. He went up to London, furnished by an unsuspecting lawyer with information, and came back to Esbrough with a smart young man from the great firm of —, with whom he made excursions backwards and forwards to his field. The result was an immediate advance of cash, and the commencement of operations.

Before many weeks elapsed, it was known that Paul Bayliss had found iron on his ground; that Paul Bayliss was erecting works with borrowed money; that Paul Bayliss had undertaken the working of newly-found mines in Ravendale county, at the expense of a royalty on every ton; and that Paul Bayliss, as for a year or two the sleepy people thought, was on the highroad to bankruptcy and ruin. Paul Bayliss knew better: he was on the highroad to a colossal fortune; and he arrived there. As for Bastable, when he found the use that had been made of his map, he used bad language, and felt small. He felt small at home, and he used bad language in his interview with Mr. Bayliss. But Bayliss was not a man to be daunted by bad language, of which, indeed, he had himself a plentiful stock ready to hand.

"You see," he said, "you made a good bargain, but you might have made a better. The three thousand shall be yours. You do not understand, of course, that what people will not do for themselves they will let others do for them. I put money into their pockets without risk or trouble, and into my own too. Come, man, be reasonable. You have got all you asked. Why grumble because I have got more than I paid for?"

Bastable began to swear again, but it was no use.

"Not one single other sixpence, man," said Bayliss—"not

one single sixpence shall you have out of it. You thought to get three thousand out of twenty or so, did you? Much you knew about iron mines! That was fifteen per cent. in your own mind, Bastable," he added, with a chuckle. "If I live ten years longer, it won't be one per cent. If I live twenty years longer, it will not be an eighth per cent."

And he was right. Bastable, when he got his three thousand, disappeared; left Esbrough without the politeness of letting his wife know that he was about to go, or what was to be his future address. Nor did he leave behind him any portion of the three thousand. Bastable was no more seen, and if any human being regretted his departure, he or she was not known to his wife and friends.

Of course the thing went farther. Paul Bayliss did not have all the luck to himself. Captain Perrymont was reminded that the surrounding lands were his, and, stirred out of his tranquil life, began also to seek for iron, and found it, for the country-side was one great iron-bed. He, too, commenced the glorious game of making a fortune. And then people took to writing books, in order to show that everybody always knew how iron was plentiful in Ravendale county, and each man called himself and his neighbour ass, because they had not been the first to turn the knowledge to a practicable use.

These things happened when Jack's education was beginning at Croxwold Rectory, ten miles from Esbrough. News of local affairs were but slightly regarded by Mr. Fortescue, to whom events of later date than the beginning of our era possessed small interest. That Mr. Bayliss had found iron; that a little town, through one's man luck and energy, was becoming a great manufacturing centre, was not enough to change the ordinary topics of talk between the clergyman and his pupil. So that the fact that Mr. Bayliss was now a rich man grew up by degrees in Jack's mind. With it he associated, dimly enough, Myles's statement that Mr. Bayliss would some day be pleased to make his acquaintance.

Meantime he had to get educated. Fortunately his patron was not one of those with whom solitude crystallises the brain. He found a boy totally ignorant even of the most elementary



learning, but quick and ready beyond belief. Jack absorbed everything, and forgot nothing. The day's work began at six, and lasted till bed-time. The pupil was never tired of learning, nor the master of teaching. There was not too much book-work, because Jack was only too ready to read all day long. They roamed about in the fields, and the man of experience talked. In these walks the boy learned something of those sciences of observation which are best thus taught: he was able to discern between flowers, and imbibed the elementary notions of geology. In the evening he watched the stars, and learned to humble his soul in presence of the heavenly vastness; the mornings were spent over his books, and after their early dinner his tutor told his unwearied listener something from the mighty book of human progress. Good men and great men adorned the pages of this unwritten work, which lay in the boy's mind like the seedling in the warm spring ground, ready to put forth leaves and flowers. There was no play. Singular to relate, the boy was never taught cricket or football, those games so essential to modern education that we are fain to give up three-fourths of our boys' time to their study. Jack had a pony, and the tutor and the boy rode together: he had a fishing-rod, and they whipped the streams for trout: he had a dog with whom he could run and shout; but actually no play. At fourteen Mr. Fortescue took him for three months to France, and they both lodged in the house of a *pasteur* near Paris. During those three months no books but French, and no talk but in French. The boy positively knew more French when they returned than any Rugbeian at eighteen. At fifteen, Mr. Fortescue took him to Dresden. Same effect. Jack learned German in the three months spent there. The two great events of his education, however, were when, about fourteen, Mr. Fortescue presented him, seeing his handiness with the household tools, with a lathe, and when, a little later, he began to teach him mathematics.

It was many years since the old clergyman had taken his degree at Cambridge, but he bought the new books and began to study the new methods. He felt his old power return,

and with it a long-forgotten enthusiasm, which he was not slow in imparting to the boy. Then he found that the right line was reached at length; Jack should be Senior Wrangler. He reckoned, however, without the boy's consent. The signs and symbols proved attractive at first; the mysterious power which the ever new combinations of letters and figures possess enchanted him for a year or two; but he wanted to make the science a means, not an end. He would be no mere mathematician wasting his life in obtaining useless results; he was a mechanician. Born in a foundry, the first light that played upon his opening eyes the fierce glare of a furnace, the first sounds that smote his ears the stroke of a hammer, how should the boy be anything but a mechanician? He loved the wheels as William loved the red deer. He took every opportunity of watching the furnace roaring like a hungry monster; the steam hammers beating up the stubborn metal as if it were so much soft wax; the molten iron pouring in liquid fire into the grooves and moulds. He loved to stand before the machines and watch their wheels go round, following every link till he mastered the secret of their motion, and grasped the thought that gave them life. They seemed to him to be animated beings. Prometheus, when he blew the divine fire into his image of clay, and saw it breathe and move, did not experience a more intense delight than Jack Armstrong, when, from his own lathe, he first turned out an engine moved by the same power which worked the steamers and the mills. Then grew up in his mind that, great as the achievements of many-minded man, there is none so great, no triumph so legitimate, no glory so enviable, as that of a mechanician. He would be a mechanician. Myles came once a year to see him. He began by coming diffidently, for he thought the boy would be ashamed of him. But after the first visit he came trustfully; and they used to make a great feast for him—a feast especially of fruit, cream, and sugar, with coffee after it, such as he loved. He came in the summer, when the strawberries were ripe, and the three would sit on the lawn—Mr. Fortescue for the most part silent, wondering what might be the mental condition of this singular Irishman

—while Myles talked, pouring out the things that came into his mind during the twelve months, and were stored up till he could tell them to Jack. It was a great night, looked for by all three as a change from the monotony of the days; and for the tutor and his boy a connection, if ever so remote, with the world of humanity beyond them: to Myles a night of enjoyment with an elevation of moral tone, to prepare for which cost him at least a month of mental training; and to the boy, a glimpse of the outer world, of which the very memory was gradually fading from his recollection.

But as for society, none, unless when some old college chum of Mr. Fortescue dropped down upon them for a week or two, when the boy sat and listened to the elders' talk. Jack, then, grew up a rather serious boy, full of strange knowledge, with a passionate love for everything that spoke of contrivancy and the mastery of Nature. When Jack was seventeen, Mr. Fortescue came to London with him and made him read at University College. He was to be Senior Wrangler, Mr. Fortescue thought. Jack read, but he spent his spare hours in the workshop, and his evenings reading books on mechanical appliances. At eighteen, Jack went to Cambridge, in obedience to orders. It was before the days when the universities and the colleges began to bid against each other by offering entrance scholarships; but at the end of his freshman's year he was first in the college examination. This was at St. John's, that noble nurse of learning, where to be first of your year means to be in the very front rank of your generation. Cambridge taught him something of the world; how other men of his own age looked on things: that there are things as worthy as mechanics: the proper bearing of man with his contemporaries: a respect for the book-worm's life: due reverence for the sacredness of ancient things: toleration of opinion. Cambridge also taught him how to row. At the end of his first year Jack struck. He would not waste any more time in mathematics. He knew enough to start him in his profession, for he would be a mechanical engineer. Mr. Fortescue, seeing the young man's determination, conceded the point with an inward struggle.



"I thought," he said, "that, instead of being a mechanician, you would be the mathematician of mechanics. I hoped that you would write books in which new mechanical principles might be deduced. And you prefer," he added mildly, "to toil in the noise and smoke of a factory, like a common workman."

Jack laughed. "I am a common workman," he said.

Then he begged another thing: that he might serve his time in Esbrough.

"No one, I suppose," he said, "remembers anything about my name or my people"—as if Esbrough could forget the Armstrongs!

"But I cannot forget how Myles hoisted me on my father's tombstone, and told me that it was once all theirs. I should like to go to Esbrough, and I should like to work with Mr. Bayliss, once my father's partner."

"Workpeople, I am told," said Mr. Fortescue, "are persons generally disagreeable in their habits, and rude in their manners. They would have no consideration whatever for you."

"That is what I want, sir. I want to be a workman, in order that I may be a master afterwards. Do you remember what you told me once about the decline of the architectural art—how that it began to decay when architects ceased to be builders? It is just the same with engineering. We get on because we are workmen as well as engineers. I shall never be able to do anything unless I am tied to the workshop for twelve hours a day."

It was during these discussions that Myles turned up in time to take his part. He had but vague ideas on the subject of professions, and, except that he wanted Jack to be a great man, cared little in what direction his greatness might turn. But that Jack, after all his beautiful education, after promising to eclipse all the later Armstrongs, should go and work in a rough dress, among rough workmen, seemed a fall of most lamentable depth; and Myles nearly cried when Jack became more obstinate, refusing, as the hawker thought, the career of glory, and choosing one of servitude. When he heard that Jack proposed to work in Bayliss's factory, he immediately proposed to introduce him himself.

"Lord! Lord!" cried Myles, "Paul Bayliss! I haven't seen Paul Bayliss since you were born, only when I see him that day when Mrs. Bastable was at her tricks in the field. Paul Bayliss! He used to come the complete farmyard—ducks and pigs—both together, mind—wonderful!—Paul Bayliss!"—the memory of the past made his voice drop a little—"Jack, he'll jump out of his skin when he sees you again."

Paul Bayliss very nearly did jump out of his skin when Myles, dressed in his best, brought Jack Armstrong to see him. He was walking up and down the lawn in front of his house. He had clearly no recollection of Myles, whose appearance sixteen years, with temperance, had greatly changed—and for the better. Of course he did not know who was the young gentleman, tall and handsome, who stood beside his visitor.

"Mr. Bayliss," Myles began, "it isn't that we're old friends that I come to see you—for faith, the best thing an old friend can do, now you've got so high up the tree, is not to be after intruding himself."

"You may certainly be an old friend, but I do not remember you."

"Well, then, I'm Myles Cuolahan. And now, maybe, you remember, Mr. Bayliss."

Bayliss did remember. He gave one look at the face of the young man who stood beside him, and turned an ashy white; his hands dropped helplessly beside him, his eyes rolled, he gasped for breath—he reeled about as he stood. Myles caught him by the arm.

"Shure, Mr. Bayliss——"

He recovered himself in a moment, and looked again at the young man. He *knew* who it was, without being told. The child whose birth he had almost forgotten—the boy whose rights he had invaded, and whose property he held, stood before him. There could be no doubt. The brown curly hair was Johnny Armstrong's; so were the full bright eyes—so was the contour of the face; and for the mouth, it was that of Johnny Armstrong's wife, clear-cut and small, set over a square and firmly-moulded chin, which was also hers. At all events, it never had been poor Johnny's.

"I remember you now," he said, with an effort. "Excuse my strangeness. I suddenly felt faint—not usual with me. Shake hands, Mr. Cuolahan—shake hands. I hope you are prospering. And this is your son?"

"My son, Mr. Bayliss! Look at him, and ask me again, if you can, whose son he is."

"My good friend, you can hardly expect me to know a young gentleman I have never seen before."

"My name is John Armstrong, sir," interposed Jack.

Bayliss, recovered by this time, received the information with outward steadiness.

"John Armstrong! Not the son of my old friend?"

"That same, Mr. Bayliss—the child that was born after the fire."

"I had to thank Myles," said Jack, "for the first ten years of my life. Since then I have been educated by Mr. Fortescue, the Rector of Croxwold."

"Ay, ay!" said Paul, not knowing what to say. "Close by—close by; not once been over to see me!"

"I came here, Mr. Bayliss, to ask you to—to take me into your works as an apprentice. I am going to be a mechanical engineer."

"Nothing else," said Myles pathetically, waving a hand which years had only made more gigantic, "will suit the boy. He leaves Cambridge College—where he beat the best of them—and he wants to work in your dirty factory, Mr. Bayliss. He might have been a bishop or a baronet, or—anything, there. For old acquaintance, you know, I thought I would give you the job. Mr. Fortescue pays."

Jack coloured, as Mr. Bayliss answered grandly—

"Pay!—pay! But you do not understand. My dear boy, if you are determined to be an engineer, come to me, by all means, and there shall be no question of payment between your father's son and myself. But it is a hard life. You will have to rise early, to work all day, and to associate with rough men. I see that you have been properly brought up. I can make no difference between you and the workmen."



"I ask for none, sir. I want to be an engineer, and I must first learn my trade."

"I will see then. Tell Mr. Fortescue that I hope to have the pleasure of calling upon him to-morrow morning. And now good-bye!"

He shook hands with Jack, nodded carelessly to Myles, and went into the house. Then he locked the door of his study and sat down to think. "Not your own: not your own." It was the voice of his conscience crying to him so loudly, that he thought it was some one outside himself. "Not your own, and the rightful owner has come at last." All his mental powers collapsed, and for half an hour he sat motionless, his brain filled with confused images, and dreadful possibilities passing before him. Presently he got up, looking bent and worn. What is it, in this abject passion of fear, that shrinks us up, making the portly man thin, and the upright man bent? Paul Bayliss, had any one seen him then, was the poverty-stricken, hesitating Bayliss of twelve years before. He remembered he had an appointment, but looking in the glass, and seeing his dazed and pallid face, sank back into his chair appalled. Then he hurriedly wrote a note of excuse, unlocked his door, gave it to a servant, and sat down again, once more to think. The morning passed into afternoon, the afternoon into evening, and when the servants came to call him in to dinner, they found him sitting where he had been all day, with his head upon his hand. He dined alone, and drank more than was good for him. After he had finished a bottle of port his fears vanished, and hope began, not to whisper, but to sing like any lark in his breast, that what had been done would never be found out, and that all was his—all was his. And so he went to bed.

The night, to the criminal, the unsuccessful man, and the man who knows that he has made an ass of himself, is a period much more trying than the day, unless you sleep through it. Paul Bayliss awoke as the clock struck two, and at the memory of the past day began to tremble and to shake. The hours that followed before the dawn were even worse for him than those he had spent in his study; for there he was only

stunned and saw things darkly: but now the whole possible, dreadful future came before his eyes, and he saw himself stripped of his wealth, his honour, his position, disgraced, beggared, and even standing in the dock before his brother magistrates, charged with . . . . Even then he did not dare to name it. In this miserable mood sleep surprised him. Then he recovered his faculties, and laughed, for he thought he saw a way.

“Johnny Armstrong owed me money—who is to say that he did not? My sister lent it him on the security of his last bit of property. Who can disprove that? The proofs of the debt were burned in the fire. The money never was paid; the property which I believed to be my sister’s, for she always said so, became mine when she died. Bah! the story is so simple, so plain, that nothing could be clearer. What a fool I am to be frightened! Mine! Of course it is mine. And if it should be proved to be his, after all, I shall state my case and leave it to be arbitrated. And as for the boy, I will look after him, and make him my friend. All the world shall know that it is Johnny Armstrong’s son come back to Esbrough, and that his old partner Paul Bayliss is looking after the boy.”

The ghost was laid, and Bayliss became once more a free man. More than that, he ceased to feel those qualms which had formerly troubled his peace of mind at irregular intervals, and became as easy and restful as the most believing Christian. More again: all out of the kindness of his heart, and gratitude for kindness shown to little Jack, he invited Myles Cuolahan to take service in his own works, made him collector of his rents, gave him a house to live in—not one of the workmen’s houses, but a small cottage just out of town, where Jack could live with him as one who was a gentleman, and assigned a sufficient salary to make the post worth having. To be sure he knew—Bayliss never let his generosity interfere with his prudence—that Myles was the most honest man in all the world, and handy with the persuasive tongue, so that his interests as regards the rents were safe.

All Esbrough heard it, and praised this man so great, so good, so careful of old ties and friends. Jack, the son of

Johnny, dear to many a reformed toper's memory—Jack who had dropped, as it were, from the clouds, met everywhere with friends who would have made much of him had he wished. But he did not wish. He meant to work; and after his twelve hours in the factory, dressed like the men, and working with them, he went home to Myles, and spent a couple of hours at least over his books, while Myles smoked and read; and then they had supper, talked, and went to bed. Every Saturday he walked over to Croxwold to spend the Sunday with Mr. Fortescue, leaving Myles to himself. And so the years of apprenticeship passed on, and Jack was a man of four-and-twenty summers, at whom the girls looked furtively as he passed along the street with light and springy step, in common workman's clothes, but bearing the look of a prince.

"It's young Mr. Armstrong," whispered the young ladies. "Look at him, dear. Isn't he the handsomest man in all Esbrough?"

"It's bonny Jack Armstrong," said the factory girls out loud to each other. "Come here, bonny Jack, and we'll kiss you."

But his thoughts were bent on other things than kissing, and Jack only laughed, shook his ambrosial curls, and went his way to woo the goddess of wheels and works.

## CHAPTER II.

**T**WENTY miles, as the crow flies, from Esbrough, lies the city of Bedesbury: twenty miles, which might, to the Esbrough people in the old days, have been twenty thousand, for the city was as little known, save by name, as the city of Coomassie. Now a network of lines runs like some great spider web across the country, and Bedesbury is no longer twenty miles, but one hour distant from Esbrough—a place where holiday excursionists go to get a change from the noise of their factories, and to be, for a time, bathed in silence. Bedesbury is an ancient city. Long ago, even before Esbrough fell into the hands of the Armstrongs, Bedesbury was an old town. There is no beginning to its history. Even when



history itself began Bedesbury was ancient. The earth which lies in its graveyards is all human dust. If the stones in its ancient gateways could speak, they could tell tales whereat the eyes of the novelist would brighten and his ears stand erect. A city of sacred memories, because all human memories are sacred. Generation after generation, the men and women have lived and loved, have suffered and passed away, each one in his own youth confident that the devil was dead and the millennium actually going to begin on his wedding-day, so far as he was concerned; each in turn finding the author of evil alive and hearty, but hoping that he himself should escape; each at last resigned to the sorrow that had been his lot, and thankful for the joys that he had ravished from the hands of avaricious fate. Go up and down the streets of the city; look at the venerable houses and the ivy-grown churches; think of your predecessors, whose very bones have vanished; remember that they lived as you do, that they thought as you do, that they hoped as you do, that they had the same weaknesses, the same strength, the same eternal doubts, and then, with a malediction on all pig-headed writers of history, sit down and get at the facts, and learn your history for yourself. The story of the world has yet to be written. It is not a story of kings and battles; these play only a secondary place. The centuries go on: save for a siege here and a battle there, a few men hurried away to the slaughterfields of priests and kings, and a few weeping women, life means the domestic hearth, the slow dropping away of the sand in the hour-glass, the recurrence of the sweet sad night, the change of the seasons, the gradual approach of grey hairs, the arrival of death, great mystery of mysteries. Always disappointment, always failure of hopes, failure of strength, failure of purpose. The history of the world might be the history of how men learn to measure their ambitions, and therefore their happiness, by their strength and their opportunities. Pray, you that have children, not that they may be strong of body, or clever, or comely, or ambitious, but pray that they may have strength of will and sense to know how to live.

Bedesbury, with its narrow, winding streets all uphill and

downhill, lies nestled round the rock, which juts out into the river, making it bend round upon itself, and describe as pretty a curve as ever was drawn by mathematician. On the rock stand its cathedral and its castle, the former a grand and simple pile, almost entirely Norman, with massive pillars and circular arches. Beside the cathedral stands the Close, and there, among the ladies who love the quiet of the spot, and the clergy who belong to the cathedral chapter, in one of a dozen houses standing on one side, covered with creepers and buried in flowers—houses dainty to look at, lovely for nine months in the year, and pretty for the other three—lived Miss Ferens, the protector of little Norah. In this retreat the child grew up. In the house, the peace of a well-regulated maiden lady's *ménage* with old servants; outside, the Close, with its level lawns, its broad elms, the rooks cawing in the branches; and beyond, the mighty wall of the great cathedral, the south wall with the round windows, the long straight lines, the buttresses, and the tower of the glorious church, into which its builders poured all their souls. And high in the air, round the tower, the swifts flying about; long narrow-streaks against the blue sky above. At service-time, when the child was not worshipping with the few who formed the daily congregation, the roll of the organ, with the rise and fall of the choristers' voices. Surely, of all peaceful spots on earth, there can be none more peaceful than the precincts of an English cathedral.

Miss Ferens was a lonely woman, having neither brother nor sister, and with the passionate longing for something to love which belongs to the nature of strong women. She was the orphan daughter of an ecclesiastical dignitary. She had been brought up under the shadow of the great cathedral, of which she knew every moulding and every tracing. She attended all the services; she knew every chorister and his history; she was familiar with every anthem, and critical rather than devout during their interpretation; one might almost say, she knew every sermon. When her father died, leaving his only child more than comfortably off, it went to her heart to think of leaving the old place she knew so well. To

worship in a meaner edifice would have been bitterness to her ; so, getting an ancient servant or two to stay with her, she took the first house in the Close which offered, and stayed on.

She had never been even commonly pretty ; her features, cast in a rough, strong mould, lacked that touch of feminine softness which sometimes goes far to redeem a face otherwise supremely ugly. She was short-sighted, too ; and the habit of peering close into things drew lines about her eyes, which were bright, but too full. She had a heavy, square forehead, which was too big for her face ; and she had a rough, low voice, too strong for a woman's. It was only when she sang, in a powerful contralto, that you could forgive that voice ; and in this, the one accomplishment among all her acquirements, she found her pleasure because she knew her power. "No man," she would say, with a contempt that was not at all affected, "ever paid me any attentions at all. Men, my dear, only care for a pretty face, and nobody ever could say that my face was pretty," which was certainly true ; and it is a very remarkable thing to observe that women, pretty or plain, never can understand the singular infatuation which makes men go wild over beauty. Do they understand what beauty means ? Only, I think, at secondhand, and because they see the pictured and sculptured forms that men admire. They lack the *sense* of beauty, which is a purely masculine gift ; they so far fail to comprehend the nature of love, that they actually conceive it possible for a man to love an ugly woman. Charlotte Brontë, a woman of great penetration in other respects, made this remarkable blunder. It is this curious deficiency in the feminine nature which makes them—while they are devoutly, and even prayerfully curious, in the matter of love, to know what it means and why it exists—utterly incapable of writing a love poem. Burning Sappho is so rare that she has passed into a proverb. Sappho, Heloïse, Louise Labé—where are the others who have written ? Where are those who have felt the devouring passion which sometimes turns men into angels or devils, and makes them half divine or less than human ?

As for poor Miss Ferens, she never thought about men at



all save with a feeling of pity and contempt. By reason of their strength they had assumed the command of the universe, and yet how badly they did everything! In the matter of preaching alone, in which, if anybody could claim to be a judge, she might, how wretched was the performance! As for governing the world, see what a mess they made of it! Look at the wars due to the mismanagement of men! She had no tender memory for any one man. She knew that women sometimes surrender themselves, their reason, their inclinations, and their independence to man; but she regarded every fresh case that came before her as another instance of the weakness of our common humanity.

And yet she was liked. Ladies liked her because she neither envied, nor bore malice, nor entertained rivalries, nor gossiped, nor outbid their own small arts of attraction. Even though she sang, and sang splendidly, she sang contralto, so that the sopranos listened with an equal mind; and though she played, it was mostly at home, and then pieces of a severity which drove frivolous clergy-persons to seek refuge in slumber or whispered talk. Men, on the other hand, liked her for her freedom of talk, her independence of thought, and the way in which she refused to defer to their judgment, while she asked no deference for her own. The young clergyman who sometimes found himself alone with her, shrank abashed at the thought of having his remarks pulled up with a short rope; but the old doctor of divinity, who knew books better than men, and opinions better than women, delighted to have a talk with Miss Ferens.

Susan Ferens. "Susan is my name," she said, "and Susan was my mother's name. A plain sort of name, like Betty and Molly, gone out of fashion now that people have become too refined for their own nature. Susan my father called me, and I thank him for it. How you got your name, Norah, unless it was some ridiculous Irish sentiment of your father's, I cannot imagine. It may bring you into trouble yet."

She had tastes and pursuits almost masculine; used to keep a canoe and a light rowing boat moored in a little hut at the river side, in which she would disport in the early summer

mornings, or even the winter afternoons, when the river was free from other craft. Not that she objected to being seen—quite the contrary, being proud of her rowing—but she objected to being run into. Once she was upset through the sudden drawing up of a barge rope. Then the privileged few who witnessed the accident, with a rapturous joy which may easily be imagined, had the pleasure of seeing the lady swim slowly round her boat, pick up the oars, lay her arms over the keel, and strike out with deliberation to the shelter of her own hut, which was close by. Once within that secure retreat, Miss Ferens gave way to temper, and used very strong expressions with regard to the barge rope.

“Games!” she used to say. “Look at the shameful way in which women are treated in the way of games. Shuttlecock and battledore, skipping-ropes, lawn tennis, croquet, and that is pretty well all. Why are we kept out of all the really exciting things? I don’t want to play football, which is a singularly ungraceful game even for a boy; and what women, with their ridiculous dresses, would look like, kicking a ball about, I really dare not think. But cricket—look at cricket. The game is picturesque, not too rough, and full of all kinds of chances for showing skill. I shall never be satisfied, Norah, till I have invented a way of playing cricket for girls. The ball need not be quite so hard, nor the bats so heavy, and perhaps the distance between the wickets need not be so great, and we might take a run for granted . . . and . . . and then, Norah, I should invent a dress on purpose for the game, with short petticoats, and girls should get over the nonsense about showing their ankles. Ankles, indeed! all the world may see *my* ankles, if they want to.”

If she had a strong prejudice, it was in favour of a Conservative form of government. “Not,” she would say, “that I expect any particular good to result when Mr. Disraeli takes office any more than when *the other man*” (she never could bring herself to pronounce the name) “is in. My dear, governments are all alike: they patch and mend when there is no patching and mending wanted; they cut a bit off the skirt and tack it into the sleeve; then they cut it off the sleeve

and put it back to the skirt again. Things go on exactly the same as if there were no government at all. Presently the time comes for a change—no need to hurry it, my dear.”

Such a woman would be sure to have her favourite reading. Miss Ferens had hers: she liked reading Voltaire, whose principles she professed to abhor. “You shall never read this odious, wicked, delightful man, Norah, because you have not had my advantages in early training. I suppose I was not more than twelve when my father pointed out to me, in a series of lessons, all possible objections to the Christian religion, with the answers to them. So that, you see, he enabled me to read the most charming of wicked writers without harm to myself. As for you, my poor child, it is a pleasure you must never look to enjoy.”

On the other hand, if Miss Ferens, strong in her panoply of conviction, read Voltaire without harming herself, as she thought, and even with profit, she claimed the further privilege of her age to read and enjoy Byron, finding in him, as she said, that warmth of imagination which was needed to supply her system with a corrective to the monotony of life.

“It is unreal, Norah, all this poetry and stuff. They make a passion out of a sentiment, and call it Love. No woman ever yet, I suppose, made herself a fool for love. They go melancholy more out of spite, jealousy, and shame, because other girls will laugh at them, and then people say they are breaking their hearts for love. Stuff and rubbish! Never let me hear, Norah, that you are in love. Perhaps—you are an impulsive creature—perhaps some day a foolish animal with a beard will pretend to rave about your dark eyes, and you will weakly let him kiss your cheek, and mumble over your hands, as if that could afford him any satisfaction. It will be from vanity and weakness, mind, that you will yield to him—vanity and weakness. But as for love, Norah, there is no such thing, except, I suppose”—and here her eyes softened—“except the love that a mother bears her children. I have felt some of it since I had you, Norah.”

We anticipate. Miss Ferens, when she brought the child to this quiet place, began educating her on a plan of her own.



First, there was to be no tenderness shown. She was convinced that tenderness only made people weak; and if it had not been for the old nurse, who lavished kisses and embraces on the little thing at morning, at night, and all day, when her mistress was not looking, little Norah would have grown up with no outward signs of affection. Miss Ferens herself was the child's only instructress, but she taught her well; and the nurse, with a mine of old-world stories, supplemented the dry crusts of knowledge, so that the girl's imagination fed on fairy and goblin tales like other children who had story-books. She grew up silent and reserved in presence of her protectress, loquacious only while she was with her nurse, to whom she poured out all her thoughts and hopes—simple enough, and amounting only to dreams of some happy future, when her father, and Jack, and she should live together. As the time rolled on, as the child of six years grew up a tall girl of fourteen, she was even more silent before her guardian, and always more loquacious with her nurse. Twice a year came her father, on those occasions armed with a present for the child, dressed with such care as befitted the occasion, and even invariably decorated with a collar, one of those lofty structures which, twenty years ago, were associated in one's imagination with Hampstead Heath on a Sunday, or Greenwich Park on a public holiday. The girl found nothing amiss; it was her father, the one person in the world, except Jack, that she had to love. Myles, after asking permission to come by letter, was received by Miss Ferens herself, who presently retired, and sent in Norah. She further showed her sense of what was right by sending in a tray with cake, bread-and-butter, and fragrant coffee. The supply was estimated by Miss Ferens's own idea of a healthy appetite, and was, consequently, to Myles Cuolahan merely a little episode in the day's eating, a passing mouthful, a slight stay-stomach, which left a pleasant recollection behind, but no solid satisfaction. He used invariably—his daughter always declaring, against the truth, that she had had tea, and wanted nothing—to clear the whole board, taking the bread-and-butter, twenty slices, or thereabouts, in one instal-

ment, piled together, and the cake, a trifle of ten inches or so in diameter by four or five high, in two or three bites. Then he drank up all the coffee, and then he began to talk about Jack.

"Now, tell me *all* about Jack," Norah cried, when the coffee was gone.

As the years grew dim the real Jack passed away, and an ideal Jack grew up in her mind. Her father painted him in such lively colours as his powers of speech allowed, and the girl's imagination supplied the rest. He was her knight, brave and strong, proof against all the temptations, whatever these might mean, which assail the Christian soldier—the temptations vaguely but fearfully spoken of in the Prayer-Book as those of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We can keep our maidens from two of these sources, at least. Remains always the third, and that is the reason why for every woman is necessary the image of her Knight, the warrior Great Heart, who shall fight for her against this invisible but frightful foe. That, too, is the reason why the nuns, who can have no Sir Galahad, glorify themselves by their mysterious spiritual alliance, and have no fear because they are the brides of Christ.

"Tell me about Jack," said Norah.

She learned that he was tall, taller than her father; that he rode a pony; that he had books that filled a dozen shelves, and had read them all; that he drew continually strange diagrams of wheels and combinations of wheels on sheets of paper; that he had a lathe, in which he executed cunning contrivances in box-wood; that he sang as he went about the world; that he was encouraged in all these pursuits by Mr. Fortescue; that——"

"Does he never ask after me?" Norah interrupted.

"Is it ask after you, *alaunah*? And why would a boy like Jack think about a little lass like you? He talks about his books, and then he asks after me."

Poor Norah! and she always thinking of him. Not true either, for Jack did ask about her, though not with the tender interest that she would have wished; for boys are

selfish, and the stronger the boy's nature the less he thinks of others, till there comes the softening touch which makes the man.

Meantime Miss Ferens, who perceived that the time of passive obedience was gone, and that Norah was of an age to become a companion, tried to relax the sternness of discipline, and by encouragement, by conversation, endeavoured to persuade her that she might now talk at least, if not act, with a certain independence. But in vain. Norah, schooled by eight long years of cold severity, could not understand what she wished. As well might Dr. Busby look for filial affection and warmth of trust from some youth whom he had just conscientiously flogged. She consulted Norah instead of ordering her; to her confusion the girl refused to be consulted. She gave up the stated hours of study; the girl continued to observe them. She asked where they should walk instead of making the choice herself; but Norah refused to choose. Was the girl a statue?

Beneath the rugged face, which was only a mask, there lurked the kindest heart; behind the harsh manner, which was partly natural and partly the result of educational prejudice, there was the tenderest yearning for love. Miss Ferens loved the child she had brought up. It was the very strength of her affection which made her impose severe tasks, and teach blind and unquestioning surrender of will. She forgot that children love to laugh, because she never laughed herself, except sometimes, after the manner of the Sardinian, and at the ways of the male sex. Thus by some accident she had forgotten the existence of the imaginative faculty, and the necessity of knowing that as well as all the rest; and from breakfast till bed-time the little girl was forced to keep her thoughts to herself. In the morning she woke up her old nurse, and told them to her; and as she grew older she continued to keep her awake at night with a flood of foolish, fond, and wondrous imagination. But to her guardian, silent, cold, uncommunicative, obedient.

One night, as Miss Ferens lay sleepless, mournfully thinking on the failure of her scheme, and devising the means of



awakening the girl's softer nature, she heard unwonted sounds in the house. She sat up; by the moonlight she perceived that her door, which she usually locked, was open—a thing which showed the trouble of her mind. She hastily got out of bed, and opening it wider, peered up and down the passage. All was dark; but all was not silent, because there was a murmur of voices, or rather a gentle ripple of one voice, and now and then a little burst of laughter, low and subdued; and Miss Ferens trembled when she discovered that the laughter and the voice—a voice that never laughed when it spoke to her—was Norah's. Yes! in the room on the stairs, built out at the back, where Norah and the nurse slept, Norah was laughing and talking, though it was past eleven o'clock. In the top storey slept the maids. They, goods girls, were sound asleep, or at least were silent.

Miss Ferens hesitated a moment, and then, wrapping herself in a dressing-gown, she crept softly along the passage and . . . feeling like a brigand . . . with a frightful dread that the world should see her or hear of it . . . with a remorse born simultaneously with the crime, and fully equal to that which might agitate the perpetrator of a thousand murders . . . with every nerve tingling in her frame . . . Miss Ferens came to the door and listened. The door was not shut.

"Now go to sleep, Miss Norah," the nurse was saying. "It's past eleven o'clock, and how shall I get you up to-morrow morning?"

"I'm not going to sleep till I please," answered the girl saucily. "Nor shall you go to sleep till I please, nurse, and so you had better make up your mind to listen. Well, you know, when I sit and sit, saying nothing, but working and reading, opposite Miss Ferens, all the time I am thinking about Jack and father. They are living together now, you know, and Jack is an apprentice, only not a common apprentice, and goes every day to learn engineering, while my father does his work for Mr. Bayliss. I am so glad he has left off that horrid going about the country, poor dear. And you know at one o'clock, just as he has told me, I say

to myself, 'There's the dinner-bell in the factory, and the men knock off work.' Knock off; isn't it funny? And there goes Jack home to dinner. As he goes along the street the people say, 'There goes handsome Jack!' Oh yes, they do, because my father told me so. Then they have dinner together. I wonder what it is and who gets it ready. I forgot to ask him about that. They have nothing but cold water. I shall never drink anything but cold water either, because they don't. Cold water and coffee and tea, you know, and nice things. I don't tell Miss Ferens the reason, because she might laugh at me, you know."

"My dear, Miss Susan never laughed at anybody."

"Well, she might say something I should not like. Then, after dinner, back to work; my Jack near the great blazing furnace, not a bit afraid of the molten iron, and all about among the big wheels that look as if they would tear you to pieces—I've seen them in a picture—and quite cool, you know, as if they belonged to him and he were the master. My father told me so. And then the work finished and home to tea; and after tea, Jack gets out his books and begins to work again at the things that will make him a great man."

"Doesn't he ever go out and enjoy himself, and flirt with the young ladies?"

"Nurse!" said Norah, much offended, "he is not that sort of young man at all. He works hard; and when he has done working, he sits with my father, who smokes a pipe, and then they talk about ME—not about young ladies, if you please. Well . . . and then, you know; then . . . when I've gone through all the day with them, and followed them quite up to bed-time, I begin to think of the time when I shall go and live with them too, and make their tea and coffee for them, and keep the house. Nurse, I'm fifteen to-morrow: don't you think—don't you think, nurse, that the time will soon come? Miss Ferens has let me off lots of lessons and things lately: don't you think that means that the time has almost come when I shall be allowed to go away and live with my father and Jack? Jack is a gentleman, you know; and my father—oh! he only wants the things

that make a man look a gentleman to the rest of the world. Jack will teach him those. You see, it isn't as if he was a rough, coarse, common man; not as if he were a wicked man—one of the people who use dreadful language, and make you frightened in the street. *My* father is a good man, and a brave man, like all his ancestors, the kings of Connaught. Nurse, what do you think?"

Nurse only grunted a gentle snore. She had dropped off sound asleep, and the conclusion of Norah's long speech was delivered to the unsympathetic furniture, and to Miss Ferens, outside the door.

"Nurse, you're a nasty, selfish thing, to go off to sleep just when——"

Here she stopped, for there was something uncanny in talking loud to a sleeping woman in a sleeping house, and in the night; so Norah closed her eyes, and in a moment, fast asleep, was away in Esbrough with Myles and Jack.

Miss Ferens crept back to her room, feeling more lonely and desolate than ever she had felt in her life before, and lay awake all night. The child, then, was not a statue; not a machine; not a cold creature with a graceful form; but warm with life, love, and imagination. And all her life, all her love, all her imagination, were given to her father and the memory of the boy she had not seen for ten years, and would not know if she met him in the street. "A rough, coarse, vulgar workman fellow!" thought Miss Ferens, "like her rough, coarse, worthless father!" For Miss Ferens had never forgotten, what the child could not remember, the squalid room in Soho, and the bleary-eyed, drunken Irishman, who nearly murdered his own daughter. "Reformed, indeed!" she said. "What reform can refine the sordid nature of the man? Reformed! and what reform can make him a fitting companion for the girl? What had she neglected in her teaching that had brought about this result? She had educated the girl to know all that women usually know, and more: she had taught her the arts of refinement; given her a taste for the highest art; made her love music, painting, literature; kept her from every rough influence; made her



physically strong and well—and this was the end of it. No repugnance to leave the life of light and refinement; no feeling of superiority to the belongings from which she had been rescued; no shrinking from association with common people and vulgar things; no aversion to drunken friends and . . . Oh! it was dreadful to think, to think that the child she had nurtured so carefully should want to leave her, just when she was becoming a friend and a companion. In the bitterness of her heart, she determined at first to make no delay in granting the girl's wish; she might go when she pleased; she might go the next day—and then—then, the waters of Marah overflowed her soul, as she thought of the lonely life that would be her own when the girl had gone.

The love that grows up in the heart untold, and lies there a sealed fountain, with all its infinite possibilities of untold tenderness, is stronger, fuller than that which lavishes its strength in a thousand embraces, caresses, and little soft words of sweetness; just as a river flowing through a desert country is stronger and fuller than one which is wasted and attenuated by being drained away into an infinite number of little rivulets of irrigation, making the meadows smile, where nature has been supplemented by the hand of man. But the big solitary river is there waiting its time, even though, like one of those mighty streams which flow through the frozen lands of Siberia, its time seems well-nigh impossible to arrive. For ten years Miss Ferens hid away in her heart an affection for the child which almost equalled the love of a mother. There was not a movement that she did not watch; not a development that she did not notice; not a growth in any direction that she did not care for . . . all but one. Where had she failed? Her father had brought her up, as she had brought up Norah. Not till the last few minutes of his life, when the old man strained her fingers in his dying clutch, and poured out in his death the few passionate words of love which, had he uttered them years before, would have changed the lives of both—not till then did Miss Ferens understand what place she had held in the old scholar's heart; nor did

she ever understand how the poor man yearned for some of the outward signs of affection which he had never encouraged.

In the early morning, when through the window, which looked towards the east, she saw the saffron morning dawn, and the first long rays of the coming sun shoot up into the sky, white-clothed heralds that came through the golden portals to tell of the coming lord of day—then, when in her garden the birds sang out their morning hymns, while through the open window came the faint perfumes of the awakened flowers, the breath of the summer—then, with the dawn, came upon the woman's distracted heart a gracious light of heaven, the gift that never fails to those who lead the life of Christ. For then she understood. All in a moment—all with a flash, like the sudden lightning glare that shone upon the heart of Saul and made him Christian: and, turning her face upon her pillow, Susan Ferens wept tears of joy and sorrow, and thanked God. Then she softly crept out of bed, wrapped herself once more in her dressing-gown, and noiselessly passed along the passage into Norah's room. The nurse was sleeping at her end of the room, the girl was sleeping at hers—sleeping with the careless grace of youth—one bare arm, from which the sleeve had slipped up to the neck, lying over her head upon the pillow—her face, with the great eyes closed and the long lashes sweeping the cheek, lying half turned towards the light—a smile upon her parted lips—the throat, still too slender in her yet early maidenhood, but white and shapely—the unbuttoned linen thrown back impatiently, as if to catch the air.

Miss Ferens stood over her bed and watched her. As she watched she smiled. "The child will teach me more before I have done," she murmured. "I think I understand what it is that men mean by beauty. This is how Haidée looked when

'———her sweet lips murmured like a brook,  
A wordless music, and her face so fair,  
Stirred with her dream as rose-leaves with the air.'"

"Why had she come there?" she asked herself. What could she do or say? Nothing. Only she stooped and kissed

her lips. The girl shook her head as if impatiently, and murmured in her dreams, "Jack! dear Jack!"

So, with another pang at her heart, but lighter and better, Miss Ferens went back to her room and sat at the window thinking, while the sun went up, and dawn turned into day. Then she dressed, stepped out, and went out for an hour's pull on the silent river. When she came back Norah was in the garden, silent, shy, and obedient, doing what she had been told to do. Miss Ferens said nothing but the usual good morning; but after breakfast, when the lessons should begin, she put the books aside, and took the girl with her into the garden.

"Norah," she said, stroking her hair fondly, and patting her cheeks, "I want to tell you a story that concerns you." Norah looked at her surprised. "Yes. Do not interrupt me, my child. Let me begin from the beginning."

She began. She told how she herself had been brought up without a mother, by a father apparently cold, hard, and stern; how not till the end had she understood the space she had filled in his heart—not till the last night had she understood what she herself might have been to him. And then, with a trembling voice and eyes dimmed with tears, she told how she had heard voices in the night, crept out of bed and listened. As she spoke she fondled the girl still, but now with both hands. Norah, not daring to look up, took one of her hands and kissed it.

"Norah," cried Miss Ferens at last, with a sort of passionate outbreak, "as I was to my father, you have been to me—and my fault, as it was his—my fault. My dear, my darling, my one thing in life! I have loved you better than any mother from the day you came to my arms. I have never told you so—I have left you to find out, perhaps when I died, perhaps never. I thought you cold and cruel because you showed me no love at all. Oh, child, child! love me a little in return, or my heart will break!"

It was the beginning of a new life in that house in the quiet Close. There was laughter now in it, and singing up and down the stairs; there was merriment over little things,



jokes and great effects of humour, where outsiders would have found nothing to laugh at at all. Norah was natural, that was all. It was her nature to sing and laugh and to be happy; it was Miss Ferens' nature to receive, sympathise, and return. The sternest woman, if you take her rightly, turns out to be some such shallow humbug as this. Behind the most rigid independence, the most uncompromising claim for liberty of action, lies the disposition to prefer the state of slavery, provided the master be one she loves. The husband, if his wife loves him, rules her with a rod of iron wrapped in flowers, like the thyrsus of Bacchus (himself, in common with St. Peter, a married man). The maiden despises the lover who grovels before her, at least for his grovelling, which she knows will not last. The son rules the mother, especially if he be a Frenchman; and, in spite of all the lectures of the screaming sisterhood, woman, unlike the Briton, ever, ever, ever shall be a slave. Perhaps I am a married man myself, and *know the sex*.

### CHAPTER III.

A WORKMAN with the rest, Jack Armstrong entered the factory at six and left it at six. Hands and clothes black and grimy with oil, he took his part in the work of the day, obedient to orders, learning, bit by bit, the meaning and life of the gigantic machinery as a whole, of which his rough fellows only knew the part. A hard but a happy life; because day after day he felt his powers grow, and knew that he was, what he had always hoped to be, a mechanician. Now, there is no happiness upon this earth to compare with that of feeling yourself fit for the work you think the best and highest. To this young man mechanics and the study of mechanics seemed the basis on which all future civilisation was to be built. By machinery life was to be simplified and rendered easier and nobler; by the powers of Nature and their application disease was to be stopped and want rendered impossible; by the teaching of mechanics the youthful intellect was to be trained. Like the Greek philosopher, he would

have written on his gate, "Let none, except the geometrician, enter here."

To some the wheels of a great engine-room seem like so many tyrants crying for the forced labour of the multitude, grinding out the souls of those who serve, rolling round and round in a ceaseless whirl—so that they cannot stay to think—the brains of those who watch and wait upon them. To Jack Armstrong they appeared in a different light. They were the limbs, the nerves, the muscles, of a beneficent monster created by the New Prometheus for the good of the world. By this monster men are brought together; by his help they travel and know each other; by him they penetrate deeper and deeper into the laws of Nature; by him they live a wider, deeper, and fuller life: so that by machinery the world is destined to travel back through its centuries, and the longevity of the antediluvians shall be repeated, when man shall so use his threescore years and ten that they shall seem for work done and enjoyment had, longer than the span allotted unto Lamech.

Jack lived among his wheels. His evenings were given to reading or to experiments with his lathe. While he read, or while he stood at his work, Myles sat silent, watching with an affectionate respect the lad whom he called his own. He also smoked his pipe the while. On Saturday Jack assumed the garb of a gentleman, and walked over to Croxwold, where he stayed over the Sunday. Myles's Sabbath was chiefly spent in writing to Norah, taking a double allowance of tobacco, and, if truth must always be told, in philandering with some of the prettier among the female factory hands. In despite of his years—Myles being now a good deal past fifty—he could still be agreeable to such of the sex as loved a persuasive tongue. It was thus a double life that the young man led. From Saturday to Monday the quiet country home with the village church and the old scholar, his benefactor. Mr. Fortescue, chiefly for the young man's sake, came out from his solitary cell and cultivated the society of his neighbours. His good family name, his ample means, and the charm of his personal manners, made this easy for him. He

gave Saturday evening dinners, to which came Paul Bayliss, now tranquil in his mind about the . . . conveyance of property to himself. With him, his daughter Ella, a comely damsel who looked out upon the world from a mass of light-brown hair and a pair of blue eyes, in which her admirers saw infinite depths of thought and tenderness—as yet mute, as becomes a maiden of eighteen. Ella was a pretty girl who knew that fact. Thither, too, came Captain Perrymont and his son Frank, a year or two older than Jack. The Captain, reserved and wrapped in his own subjects, took little notice of the young people, and came chiefly to talk with Mr. Fortescue over subjects which he could work up into his favourite pursuits. Whatever importance Mr. Bastable attached to the divining-rod, in the mind of Captain Perrymont it remained a great and irrefragable proof of at least one half of magic. In his own old house he carried on the same experiments which deluded the wise men of the Middle Ages—always seeing the prize dangling before his eyes, and always seeing it elude his grasp. Frank Perrymont took small interest in his father's pursuits. He was a soft and dreamy youth: had a portfolio full of poems, and was chiefly remarkable for a general inaptitude for useful or practical business. Like most thoroughly unpractical men, he had been at Oxford.

“Life,” said the Captain, one day after dinner, “should be a long struggle to wrest from the jealous Powers the secrets that keep the world in motion.”

“Life,” said his son, “should be a long struggle after the expression of thought.”

“Thought,” said Mr. Fortescue, “is based on a knowledge of Nature. When that is small, thought is speculation: as that grows larger, thought becomes induction.”

“Life,” said Mr. Bayliss, “is, as I take it, a battle to get the better of everybody else. The weakest goes to the wall. What do you say, Jack?”

“I think,” said Jack, “that there is only one thing fit to live for, and that is to make everything in the world the slave of our ingenuity. The greatest man is the inventor.”



Each struck the key-note of his character; and the old scholar looked from one to the other, resting his eyes, bent with a sort of wonder, on the boy he had brought up.

"What says my Ella?" asked Bayliss, turning to the girl.

Frank Perrymont looked sharply at her. She looked at Jack for a moment and blushed, but only smiled a reply. Had the girl found any words and dared to use them, she would have replied, "Life means love-making with Jack Armstrong." Paul Bayliss partly read her thoughts, because his daughter was the only person in the world whose interests he cared for, except his own. He, too, looked at Jack for a moment, and became thoughtful.

Occasionally Paul Bayliss would invite Jack to his own parties. These were formal receptions, with a dinner at which there was a great quantity of silver plate, and much conversation over the wine, of which Mr. Bayliss was lavish. Hospitality, at least, was one of his virtues. After dinner there would be a little music in the drawing-room, where Ella would warble a few ballads at her father's request, or play an elaborate piece with perfect execution and no expression. And then the father would talk to Jack about his progress, and hint solemnly at possible splendours before him, if all went well. Jack laughed when he thought of the pompous air of patronage: he partly saw the nature of the man, how selfish he was, how keen after his own interests, how sharp and cunning, how ready to embrace every opportunity of getting something more for himself. He only confided his opinion to Mr. Fortescue and to Myles.

"Mr. Bayliss," said the former, "is a self-made man. That means that he has had to assert himself, and has rubbed off all those little angularities which make sensitive men loth to push themselves. In such a man we look for the traces of early roughness: we expect to find an undue estimate of the merits of success; there will probably be a little self-assertion. But I have always understood that Mr. Bayliss is an honourable and an upright man."

"I daresay he is," said Jack; "but he seems to care no more for the hands than if they were machines."

"Paul Bayliss," said Myles, "is a great man, Jack. He's made all his money himself. It's beautiful to see how he goes about, like a cock-turkey, bubbling with conceit. And, faith, he's got plenty to be conceited about, and right he is to bubble. I remember when he used to sing as small as a she-robin on a frosty day. Paul Bayliss is a great man. And as for the hands, why, Jack asthore, what are they worth, most of them, with the drink and the waste? Their souls are not worth the trouble of damning or saving. What are you to do," he went on grandly, "with people who drink?"

"Captain Perrymont is almost as bad," said Jack. "He thinks about nothing but the philosopher's stone. He came into the workshop the other day on purpose to get me to translate a passage that bothered him. I never saw such stuff for a sensible man to read, and told him so. What do you think he said, Myles? He said that it was waste of time and trouble to invent and make machines, smelting furnaces, and the rest of it, because in a year or two he was going to show the way of transmuting all metals into gold, silver, or anything we want."

"That would be grand, too," said Myles. "Think of being rich, and nothing to do but to lie on your back and talk of ould Ireland!"

Society in Esbrough was like a planetary system moving round two suns, represented by Paul Bayliss and Captain Perrymont. The planets, that is to say, moved in their regular ellipses, with these two for the foci. Those who respected ancient birth owned allegiance to Perrymont: those who affected native industry and the power of success worshipped Paul Bayliss. And the two suns themselves, with no jealousy or envy of each other, accepted the position thrust upon them, and behaved as royally as the two kings of Brentford. About the rest of Esbrough society, however, Jack was careless. Frank Perrymont he liked whenever he could find time to talk to him; Paul Bayliss bored him; the Captain irritated while he interested him; Ella Bayliss he hardly ever noticed; and the quiet parsonage of Croxwold was the only place where he turned for rest. There was, however, one other house in Esbrough at which he was a weekly visitor, and of

that house, strangely enough, he never spoke to Mr. Fortescue. It was the house occupied by Mrs. Merrion. Mrs. Merrion rented a villa which stood, itself of considerably better standing in villa rank, exactly opposite the cottage of Myles Cuolahan. She was a widow; a tall, handsome woman, who might be any age from thirty to forty; her features were good, but too strongly marked; her eyes full; her lips full; her bust full; her hands white, shapely, and rather fat. She had black hair, and plenty of it; black eyebrows, black eyes, and the rosiest of lips: everything about her seemed to cry out for very ripeness, like some rich pear that waits but a touch to drop. She had come to the town about the time that Jack was apprenticed to Mr. Bayliss. She wore, then, the deepest crape, and spoke in solemn whispers broken by melancholy sighs. She gave no reference to the landlord of the house she rented, but paid her rent six months in advance. And she settled down, accompanied by a lady who was none other than Mrs. Keziah Bastable. Bastable, as we have hinted, on removing himself out of sight, neglected to furnish his wife with his address or any portion of Paul Bayliss's three thousand pounds. Then Mrs. Bastable disappeared, too, from Esbrough, which was her native town, and for a space of years was no more seen. When she came back, in the evident capacity of humble companion, she hunted up her old friends, and informed them that she was living with her husband's second cousin, a widow, Mrs. Merrion. From the same source the Esbrough people learned that the late Mr. Merrion had died in some foreign service, the nature of which was left to imagination. Some averred that he was killed in the army of Garibaldi; some said he fell in action, being an officer in the Indian service; while others, more daring, declared that they knew Mr. Merrion to have been a scion of a noble house, and that he was a general in the Confederate service. And presently it became known that this was the correct version of the story, because the widow herself said so.

People with whom Mrs. Bastable was connected by relationship were in too humble circumstances to call upon the young widow, but some of the ladies belonging to the higher



social rank did so. Yet the acquaintance never ripened into friendship; there was something wanting in Mrs. Merrion; she lacked, perhaps, some little secret indications of gentle breeding which only ladies notice; or perhaps, as she said herself, she made the husbands discontented with their wives. The clergyman and the clergyman's wife called and received her subscriptions regularly for all the "objects." Mrs. Merrion tossed them her guineas generally with a contemptuous remark and the threat that she should discontinue for the future. But the year came round, and Mrs. Merrion's annual guinea appeared again in the list. Why she did it she could hardly tell.

"It's a sinful waste and a throwing away, Jenny," said Mrs. Bastable, who, oddly enough, always called her Jenny when no one was present, and Adelaide "before company." "It's a wicked waste, Jenny."

"So it is, Keziah," Mrs. Merrion replied. "So it is. But when they come with their stories and their lamentations—I never could resist giving money to a beggar, and never shall. Lord! if I had all the money that I've given away."

One day as Mrs. Bastable, who spent most of her time at the window making observations on the passers-by, was in her usual place of observation, she saw, to her great astonishment, Mr. Myles Cuolahan dressed in clerk-like fashion, with black coat and collar, carrying an umbrella instead of a thick stick, and no pack on his back. With him was a young gentleman in whose features Mrs. Bastable recognised, with still greater amazement, the face of him who had for a short period acted as page to the House of Divination.

"Lord bless my soul!" she cried out, waking up Mrs. Merrion, who was taking an afternoon nap. "If it isn't our Jack and that limb of the devil, Myles Cuolahan."

Mrs. Merrion started up with a curious look of terror on her face, and rushed to the window, peering carefully behind the curtains. The terror instantly subsided, but not before Mrs. Bastable had noticed it.

"I see a handsome boy of twenty or so," said Mrs. Merrion, "and a man of fifty. Who is 'our Jack'?"

"How frightened you looked, Jenny!" said Mrs. Bastable softly. "It isn't the first time you've looked so. Who is it you're afraid to see?"

"Those that ask nothing, Keziah," said Mrs. Merriion, "are certain to get told no lies."

It may be gathered from the above that the conversation of the ladies in their strict privacy was not restrained by those fetters of politeness which hinder the flow of natural talk in society.

"Who's 'our Jack'?" repeated Mrs. Merriion. "Such a vulgar expression! as if he was your son, or your knife-grinder, or your commercial traveller. What a handsome boy! Look at him turning round. I don't think I ever saw such a handsome boy. Oh, you curly-headed darling! I'd like to take your curls in my hands and kiss your rosy lips for you till you kissed me again, I would."

"Jenny," said Mrs. Bastable, "at least be respectable. I may be vulgar, but I never——"

"You never what?" cried the other, flushing all over. "Keziah Bastable, I've shook women for less!"

"Lord bless me, Jenny!" replied the other, "you make me all of a flutter. Look, they've gone in there. Jenny, it's no good talking, I must find out whether Myles Cuolahan's seen my husband. Myles knows everybody, my dear, and where to find everybody."

Mrs. Merriion was back in her easy-chair by the fire, with her eyes half closed. "Go and call upon him, then," she answered, "and find out; and when you come back bring me handsome Jack. Your Jack, indeed! He ought to be my Jack."

Mrs. Bastable tossed her head at these ill-regulated words, and went to put on her "things." She found Myles taking off his coat, as his wont was, to take his tea in comfort.

"It's nigh upon ten years, Mr. Cuolahan," she said, "since you saw me last."

The Irishman surveyed her steadily for a few minutes; then he recollected her face. "An' a fine woman still," he said, rising and offering a seat; "a purty woman still, Mrs. Bastable. And how's business with the hanky-panky?"

"I've not come to talk about my good looks, Mr. Cuolahan," replied the lady, softened by the compliment. "How are you? and how's Jack?"

At that moment Jack entered.

"It is Mrs. Bastable, Myles," he said, shaking hands. "How are you, Mrs. Bastable? and what have you done with all the spirits?"

"There never was such a boy for fearlessness," she answered. "There, Mr. Cuolahan, I give you my word that I've gone up the stairs at night, and sat down and screamed with the terror. Voices on the landings were nothing, because there was voices under the bed, for that matter, if you were afraid of voices. But you don't like fingers in your hair, and at your throat; it isn't pleasant to have your legs pinched and your face slapped. Some people ran away from the house when they heard footsteps tramping, and saw marks of naked feet on the sand; but I didn't mind that. Spirruts that tramp and make marks in the sand, and talk to each other night and day, I don't mind, and never did; but them that play tricks I do not like, and don't mind saying so. Only that boy there, he never feared any of them."

"It was a queer house," said Jack, "and some day I mean to ask Bastable how he did it. Where is Bastable?"

"Gone!" replied his wife, taking out her handkerchief.

"Is he dead?" asked Myles. "Well, I'm sorry; but the best of us must die. Bastable wasn't among the best, certainly, or else——"

"He's left me," she sobbed out; "and I thought, Mr. Cuolahan, that you might have seen him on the road."

"I am no longer on the road," replied Myles proudly; "I am collector of rents and receiver to Mr. Paul Bayliss, Esquire and Justice of the Peace. Mr. Bayliss is not too proud to give a lift to an old friend, and the best thing the old friend can do is to sink the past, take the favours, and do the work."

"And what is the boy doing?"

"Jack has been educated, Mrs. Bastable, since he went to help the hanky-panky. He's a gentleman, as a lady of



your penetration must have found out by this time, and he's going to be an engineer. Jack Armstrong is a gentleman."

"Is his name Armstrong? There were Armstrongs once in Esbrough," Mrs. Bastable said.

"And so there will be again, ma'am; for Jack is the last of the ould stock, and he doesn't look like letting the breed die out, does he?"

Mrs. Bastable started to her feet and caught the boy by the shoulders, looking at his face.

"Lord!" she cried, "he isn't Johnny Armstrong's son?"

"That and nothing else," said Myles.

"I thought I knew his face. And to think that Johnny Armstrong's son was in my house ten years ago, and me not to know it! Now, look here, Myles Cuolahan, there's one thing you'll please to remember; however you got hold of Johnny Armstrong's son you know best, but the Armstrongs were gentlemen always, though Johnny did go down in the world. Never you let out to any one that the boy here was ever . . . ever . . . in my house."

"I am not ashamed of it, Mrs. Bastable," said Jack.

"Perhaps not; and you've done nothing to be ashamed of, nor me neither. But I don't tell people that I can bring ghosts into their houses by swarms if only the right man gets hold of me, nor I don't want people to know. You are a gentleman, Mr. Jack Armstrong; I know all about your family, though who your mother was I don't know. She was Cumberland born, she was. You are going to get up in the world. Don't let out by even a whisper that you've ever worn a page's dress, and I shan't. Myles Cuolahan, you'll remember. As for my husband, I think he must be dead, or else he'd want me again, because he's the greatest mesmerist in all the world, and I'm the greatest clairvoyong. If he were not dead, he'd be back again, throwing me into my old trances. But he is either dead or far off, for I never feel him as I used to. Oh! he's dead! he's dead! my poor man!"

"Don't take on," whispered Myles. "There's plenty of good men left in the world disconsolate like yourself, more's

the pity." But Mrs. Bastable refused to listen to the voice of gallantry, and retreated across the road to Laburnum Villa.

A day or two afterwards, as Jack was passing on his way home from work, he met a lady who accosted him to his great astonishment.

"Mr. Armstrong," she said, with the sweetest of smiles. "It surely *is* Mr. Armstrong, is it not? I thought so. We are near neighbours, Mr. Armstrong, and I learn that you are acquainted with Mrs. Bastable—my companion, in fact," she added, with a charming candour; "her late husband was my second cousin. My name is Merrion, and I shall be very glad if you will come over any evening that you can spare from your studies."

Jack was in his workman's dress, but in Esbrough these things are not much regarded.

"Come this evening, then, Mr. Armstrong," continued the widow. "Come and take tea with us. Go home and make yourself presentable, and we will wait for you."

She smiled and nodded, and tripped away across the road, the airiest of full-grown sylphs. Jack turned moodily into the cottage.

"Here is a bore, Myles," he grumbled. "I've got to go and have tea with Mrs. Merrion, to meet Mrs. Bastable, just when I wanted a long evening's work."

"Never mind the work, Jack. It's in great good luck ye are. I saw her go by yesterday. Oh, the Saints!" Myles lifted his eyes to heaven, and went on preparing his coffee. "Be thankful, Jack—ye will be when your my age—when a purty woman speaks to you. Go; put on your best clothes—thim as ye wear at Mr. Bayliss's—and be civil to thim both. That Mrs. Bastable's not bad-looking—I've seen worse—for an Englishwoman; but too much jowl."

"Why, her eyes are like oysters," said Jack.

"And what can be better than oysters, tell me now? There's pearls in oysters, too."

When Jack presented himself, he found Mrs. Merrion dressed to receive him: overdressed, a little; but the heavy

folds of her black velvet fell gracefully round her tall, full figure, and the gold chains and bracelets glittered and shone in the lamplight. Jack noticed how white her hands were, though rather large; how full and lustrous her eyes were: and he saw—for Jack was observant—that there was the slightest suspicion of rouge upon her velvet cheeks.

“Is it not provoking, Mr. Armstrong?” she cried. “Mrs. Bastable has got one of her headaches this evening, and you will have to mope yourself to death with me. Do you think you can bear my company for a whole evening? Stay with me an hour, and then you shall go whenever you like. And now, if you will ring the bell, you shall have some tea.”

Mrs. Merrion’s tea meant a dainty spread, hastily improvised by one who was experienced in “petites surprises.” It was only an hour or so since she had invited Jack; but there were delicate cutlets, a little curry, pâté cut in slices, toast covered with toothsome little fish, and a bottle of French wine. All this was at Jack’s end: at her own was a little tray with coffee.

“Now, Mr. Armstrong, give me the least little bit of curry—it is prawn curry, made by myself, with cocoa-nut in it; and you may give me a single glass of wine—it is Cos Estournel; and then let me see you make a good tea.”

Jack laughed, and had as good a dinner as he had ever sat down to—even at Mr. Fortescue’s. After the coffee, Mrs. Merrion placed him in an easy-chair, and sat down opposite to him. She twisted a cigarette for him, but Jack refused it; whereupon she looked with longing at it for a moment, and put it back in the cigarette-box. And then she began to ask him questions.

She had a wheedling way, half of flattery, half of pretended interest, under which this innocent Cherubin succumbed in a moment, and bared his whole life. To be sure there was no reason why he should not. Then she played to him—gentle music, with the passion in it of those who are loved, not of those who love; such as should be sung in some island where it is always afternoon, while lovers lie in arbours and gaze into the depths of each other’s eyes. And then she sang in



a low and soft voice, that could be strong and swelled up at intervals, as if the depths of her nature could find expression in trumpet tones, if necessary. And then, while the young man's nerves were all quivering with excitement—for what mechanician or mathematician was ever deaf to music?—she came back to her chair, turned the lamp half down so that the light of the fire alone was reflected back from the pictures, and brought out great masses of red colour, with deep and black shade in the curtains. And then in a murmurous voice, she began to talk.

Jack was sitting—how he got there I do not know, nor did he—on the low stool at her feet. She was twining her fingers about his curly locks, and dropping out her silver stream of sentences—all disjointed—as if she wanted no answer to any of them, and let her thoughts glide as they would. But she never took her hand from him; and as she spoke her fingers stroked his cheek, or lightly touched his eyes, or played with his curls.

“Jack Armstrong . . . Jack . . . It's a pretty name . . . you know I liked you the very first time I ever saw you . . . My poor husband, the General, always said that if we had any children one should be Jack. But we never had any—I was too young, or he was too old . . . I don't know . . . He died two years ago. You are a very handsome boy, Jack. Let me call you Jack; not Mr. Armstrong, it's too stiff. And you shall call me by my name—Adelaide. . . . Do you like Adelaide? Adelaide Constance. Call me Constance if you like it better. Call me Sappho—call me Doris—call me Lalage or Chloris—only, only call me thine. . . . What nonsense! . . . My husband's sister, Lady Susan—but you are not interested in me and my people. . . . You are a very handsome boy, indeed, Jack, and I mean to be very fond of you. . . . I am ever so much older than you, though you are so big and strong. How old are you? Twenty? Why I am four-and-twenty—twenty-four . . . poor me! getting an old, old, withered woman! You men only care for a woman so long as she has got her early freshness of youth and good looks. When they are gone, your love goes too, and you let us die—if we can die—or live, if you call it

life, without love. Love?—your time is not come yet, Jack, but it will, some day . . . and then you will know. Love?—Jack, there is nothing in the world else worth living for. You may invent your machines, and be as clever as you can. But they are only good for one thing—to make money, and then to marry and spend it with the girl you love. This is a beautiful country. There are always some men slaving and working to put money together; and when they are dead, there are always their sons, spending it in making themselves happy. Make up your mind to save money, Jack, and spend it yourself. Invent something that will force other people to pile up a great fortune for you before you are forty. Then go up to London and enjoy it. Flowers are nice, and so is sunshine—so is champagne—so is music . . . but, Jack—Jack—remember—remember—remember that all these things are nothing without a wife to enjoy them with.”

As she spoke she stooped her head, and lightly kissed him on the forehead.

“Go,” she said, “you are only a boy; and they would tell you I have been corrupting you. That is nonsense. You are a man almost—quite—very soon you will know that I am right. Work, Jack. Make money as fast as you can, because money brings love, and champagne, and feasts; it brings bright eyes and merry voices; it turns the earth into heaven.”

Jack felt giddy and ashamed as he rose.

“Jack,” Mrs. Merrion went on in quite a different voice, “Mrs. Bastable is a shocking pump. There is no good coming here to meet her. Come only when she is out, and you and I can sit here and talk to each other. My Pauline I brought from Paris. She will not talk, you know.”

Jack wondered why Pauline should not talk if she pleased; but he did not say so, and presently repaired homewards. The snoring of honest Myles pealed loud and long in the cottage; and Jack tossed about in his bed with troubled dreams and heated thoughts.

As for Mrs. Merrion, that excellent woman went to her bedroom, where a fire was burning; she took off her finery, certainly looking considerably over four-and-twenty when it

was gone, and then she smoked a cigarette with a hot glass of brandy and water. Mrs. Bastable, who had indeed spent the evening in the kitchen with Pauline, had neither brandy and water, nor cigarette, nor fire in her room. Perhaps she had the blessings of a calm conscience. I have long suspected that people who ought, considering the ways of their lives, to be the most sleepless and dream-haunted, pass the most innocent and refreshing nights. At least, whatever Mrs. Merrion's conscience might have been, she slept like a babe of six months old.

That was the beginning of Jack's periodical visits to Laburnum Villa. Henceforth it was understood that on Friday night he was to spend the evening with Mrs. Merrion. It must not be supposed that this lady devoted the whole time to such conversation as we have described. Jack found it, after a time, sugary, and would have no more of it. Her talk about flowers, and champagne, and music bored him, partly because he did not understand the connection of these refinements with his own life. Then she had the good sense to see that he became irritated and suspicious when she talked about the kind of London life she liked best, and changed the subject. But her theme always came round to love, only now it was love in the country, with the buttercups in the meadows, and the factory chimney visible in the distance. The mind will only assimilate what it has a taste for, and what it already knows something of, and Jack's nature threw off the subtle poison of Mrs. Merrion's suggestions as he washed his hands of the oil after the bell struck six. He called her Adelaide in the little drawing-room. She called him Jack, or sometimes dear Jack; but she never kissed him now, because Jack was twenty-four, bearded, tall, and manly; and he never even dreamed of kissing her.

Youthful England is so wise that it will probably think this insensibility of Jack to proceed from stupidity; yet Jack was not stupid: or from a naturally cold heart; yet Jack was full of possible passion.



## CHAPTER IV.

IT was when Jack was completing his apprenticeship that a great event happened to Myles Cuolahan. He got back his daughter. Norah came home to live with him. The idea of her return was a brilliant thought hit upon in one of his visits to Bedesbury, where he went, now that his life was settled instead of nomadic, regularly every quarter. The same forms were always gone through, with coffee and cake, save that Norah, having communicated to Miss Ferens a larger idea of her father's appetite, the refectation, though the same in kind, was wonderfully altered as regards quantity.

"And now, father," said Norah, always anxious to know something of the home life of that strange house where Jack and her father lived in bachelor chummery; "now, father, tell me, please, something about your own life—how you go on every day."

Myles laughed. He could not understand her longing to know all the details, even the smallest, of his daily life—a thing which seemed so simple to know. Besides he had told her already a dozen times.

"How we live, Norah? Well, then, I'll begin at the beginning. The ould woman, she comes and makes breakfast. All the morning I go collecting, and Jack, he goes hammering. We have our dinner at one, and at six, when Jack comes home, we have our tea; and at nine, when Jack has done his work, we have our supper; and then we go to bed at ten. That is how we live."

"Tell me what the house is like."

Myles's face brightened.

"'Tis a jewel of a house. Norah, darlint, when will ye come and see it? Wait till I tell ye. There's a creeper outside all in flower now, because 'tis June, and it hangs each side of the porch. There's a garden in front, with a lilac-tree and flowers—roses and mignonette; and in the middle of the bed a raal shamrock, which Jack put there for me. And there's two rooms downstairs, let alone a lovely kitchen at the back,

where I'd like to sit myself; but it isn't manners, with Jack a gentleman. One of them rooms is mine, an' it's there that we have our dinners and our teas; and the other is Jack's, where he's got his lathe. His books is all there, too, and a mighty lot he's got on the shelves. Where the knowledge is all put away the Lord knows. There's a table there too, and a couple o' chairs; and sometimes I sit there and watch him while the wheels go round—whir-r-r—and he stands over it quiet and grave, like a praste at a mass, and presently there it is, finished and done, neat and illigant."

It was at this point that the idea came to him. "Norah, my rosebud—Norah, asthore—Norah, alaunah, it's happy I should be as the lark in the sky with his song and his little wings beating time to his tune, if we'd got you with us, too, to sing of an evening while the wheels of the lathe go round and round. For Jack's so full of thought that he cannot talk to me, and for want of somebody to talk to, I feel sometimes as if I must get the pack upon my back and go off upon the road again, where all the people know Myles Cuolahan." Norah said nothing. "Come home to your old father, darlint. Come home. Bring him the smiles upon your lovely face, and the kisses of your sweet lips, and the songs that come all fresh from your tender young heart. It's hungering and thirsting I am to get my Norah back again. And she a lady. And Jack a gentleman. And me a proud and happy man."

Norah said nothing. Only she stroked her father's face, and her eyes glistened.

"It's a poor place, compared with this, Norah. The furniture isn't like Miss Ferens'. There's no pictures, and no books, only Jack's, filled with queer figures and letters that look like heathen Hebrew. And there's no reason why you should leave the kind, good woman that brought you up, only that your father loves you. Don't cry, mavourneen; don't cry. Why should your purty oyes be spoiled wid the tears? Only think of me. And if you see the way, come home and make me happy. And now, Norah, I'll have another cup of coffee, and I'll finish the cake, and be off."

Norah went straight to Miss Ferens and told her all. It

was in the twilight of the June day, and they sat in the garden while the noise of the town rolled upon their ears from below, the cries of the boats upon the river, the rolling of wheels, the songs of the streets, as of some unquiet world which did not belong to them. Norah lay upon the grass holding Miss Ferens' hand while she told her tale, and laying it against her cheek while she spoke, in soft, caressing fashion.

"It is my father, dear," she concluded.

Miss Ferens kissed her, and the tears dropped upon Norah's forehead with the action.

"He is your father, child," she repeated, in the strange, harsh voice with which she spoke when strongly moved. "He is your father. I have looked for this for many years. No, Norah dear, I do not reproach you. I do not feel any bitterness or disappointment, so far as you are concerned. Thank God! I know now that we love each other, and always shall, in this world and in the next. You are my child, my very own child: you have made my life happy; but I could not hope to keep you for ever. Only you are claimed from me in a way which I did not look for. Norah, I will tell you all. When I took you from your father he was—I mean his circumstances—were such that I expected never to set my eyes on him again. I thought he would go away, be forgotten and lost, never appear any more, never find out where we were gone, and that you would be mine alone. It is not so. He is prosperous, and asks for his daughter back again. What can we say or do? You must go, Norah."

The evening breeze sighed as Norah looked round upon the lovely garden, and saw the great square cathedral tower frowning upon her against the dark-blue summer sky.

"You must go; but you must go happily. Only, Norah, do not leave me quite alone."

"As if I could ever forget you, dear!" said the girl.

"No," replied Miss Ferens in her deepest tones, "you will never forget me—that I know." It was exactly, to an outsider, as if Dr. Keate, of whipping memory, was informing a pupil, after his seventy-times-seventh flogging, that he was not likely to forget the flogger. "You will not forget me.



We have learned each other too well. Of that I am not afraid. But think of me, dear, alone in this house, and come to see me often. Give me till to-morrow to think."

She rose and walked about the gravel walks of her garden, holding Norah by the hand. From time to time she drew the girl nearer to her and kissed her forehead.

"You are eighteen, child—almost a woman—I cannot bear—I cannot bear to think that you should be thrown into the company of rough and coarse men. Tell me about—this—this Jack."

Miss Ferens had, from the very beginning, nursed a blind jealousy of poor Jack.

"Jack is a gentleman. He was educated by the Rev. Mr. Fortescue, and taught all sorts of things. Jack goes to proper people's houses. His ancestors were the owners of all Esbrough, and Jack is going to make his fortune. I am proud of my brother Jack."

"But he isn't your brother, dear Norah. That is—yes—go on thinking him your brother. And there are no rough people go to the house?"

"I don't think so. If there are, dear, can you not trust me to hold my own? Besides, I mean to turn them out. Oh! I shall be very brave. And then I am to come and see you often."

They went indoors. Miss Ferens was excitable and nervous. She took down books from the cases and laid them in piles.

"You will want your Tennyson, dear—and here is Keats, though I am not sure that he is the best poet for a young lady to read. Here is the 'Christian Year' for you. You like it, though I think it is sentimental. And here are all your favourites. You must take them all away with you."

"Indeed, I will do nothing of the sort. Do you think I am going to strip your beautiful shelves? And what shall I read when I come to see you?"

"Norah, let me have my own way. I've never given you, I do believe, a single thing in my life. And now I'm going to begin. All these books are yours. If I want them I shall buy them again. Now for a piano. Will you have this one,

that you learned to play upon, or shall I buy you a new one altogether?"

"O Miss Ferens!" cried Norah, "I cannot take it."

"And I cannot play on it when you are gone. Norah, every note would go straight to my heart. Take the piano, and I will get another."

And so with everything; Norah was not to go empty-handed to her new home. Dresses, music, books, pictures—she was to take all that could make her life brighter or happier.

It was late when they went to bed. In the night, Miss Ferens was lying, sleepless and tearful, thinking of the lonely future before her, when a figure in white stepped into the room and knelt down beside her, clasping her round the neck.

"Tell me not to go, Miss Ferens, and I won't go. It is cruel and hard for me to leave you all alone. Tell me not to go."

"You must go, darling Norah! You must go, my love, my sweet, the only joy of my life! Don't tempt me. It is your duty—our duty. Let us pray to be guided in our duty."

Through the open casement the moon shone upon the kneeling figures of the two: withered, unlovely, harsh the features and the form of the elder—fresh, young, bright, and fair those of the younger. Norah's long black hair streamed down her back and lay in ringlets on the floor while she knelt; her fair young cheek pressed upon the hand of the other, which she held in her own, looked white and silvery in the bright moonlight; the folds of her white drapery showed the contour of her shapely figure; her pretty feet, bare and white, lay upon the carpet; her eyes were full and streaming with tears. They prayed silently for help, and help came as it always does to those who do not mistrust the Giver of all good things. Presently they arose, and sitting together on the bed, they talked of the strange outer world, where rude rough men live, and uncouth women turn Paradise into Pandemonium. Little knew Miss Ferens of the wickedness and dangers of the world, save for that brief time when she tried district visiting in Sheffield, and picked up in its slums—Norah. But she knew it was something beyond her

ken, for which Norah had been insufficiently prepared, and she trembled.

"I do not know much, Norah, but I know something. There are always wicked men, and foolish women. Ah!"—she gave a great gasp, and caught the girl to her breast—"if I only thought that your father was watchful, and—and—your brother good."

"Jack is very good," said Norah solemnly.

"And presently some one will want to marry you, and you will give him all your heart—your heart of hearts—and think him the greatest man in the world, when very likely he will be the least. And your father will consent, and you will go away with him, and perhaps find your hero a coward, and worse, and have nothing to pour out your affections on but your children. O Norah! and we might have been so happy—so happy here, as we always have been."

"But I am not going to marry, dear—I am not even going to think about marrying."

"Yes—yes; so all the girls say. But they do marry, when their time comes. Women are weak, dear. They cannot bear to say no; and when men get foolish and talk about happiness and all the rest of it, their good resolutions fly to the winds. Nearly all the women that were girls with me are married. And even I—even I—the ugliest and the plainest of them all—— No, Norah, I always knew that I was ugly, and I am much too old to pretend anything else—even I, Susan Ferens, I verily believe, would have married between twenty and thirty, if any one had asked me—me, exactly like my father. And he was so ugly that when he was at college, the men used to call him—they did, Norah—they used to call him—the—the—the Devil. Poor papa! with a heart like Augustine, and a voice like Chrysostom."

They passed the night so, in fond and encouraging talk, and as the morning dawned, Norah's eyes grew heavy, and Miss Ferens laid her down upon the bed, where she slept till nine. But Miss Ferens slept not at all. The blow that had fallen upon her seemed to crush her. She was thrown into a misery that left her no room for lamentations and none



for sleep. God gave her one thing to love, and that was taken away from her. God had made her life happy, full, and complete, and it was to be thrown back to its old condition, incomplete, empty, and dreary. She wrote to Myles Cuolahan:—

“Your daughter has told me of your wish to have her back with you. I cannot, much as I would desire, stand between a father and his only child. She shall go to you whenever you like. I only stipulate that she shall have such of the comforts of life as are possible; that she shall be considered as a lady; that no unworthy company be forced upon her—of which I am quite sure you will be careful; that you shall be watchful of her good name in the slightest particular; that she shall be allowed to come to me every Friday to stay until Monday, and that her own rooms at least shall be properly furnished. I send you a cheque for the last purpose. If it is not enough, let me know; if it is more than enough, give the rest to Norah. And for all the other things, please understand that you may ask for as much as you please, provided it is spent in making Norah happy. I know that you love the child. I know, too, that you have risen above the besetting sin that threatened once to wreck you. But you have never yet had a young lady to care for, and it is with the gravest apprehension that I let her go out of my hands. Be watchful and prudent, and in any cases of difficulty write to me.”

Myles received the letter with every feeling of astonishment. What was he to be watchful about? Why should he be prudent? What cases of difficulty could arise? He showed it to Jack, who read it thoughtfully, and was silent for awhile.

“You see, Myles,” he said at length, “Norah is a princess. She has been brought up by a rich woman, and accustomed to little refinements that we can hardly offer her. We shall have to make a clean reformation of the whole house before she comes. There are dozens of things to alter.”

“I know—I know,” said Myles, thinking of furnishing Norah’s room. “Bless you, I’ve thought of them all.”

And then, as bad luck would have it, he resolved on effecting a great surprise, managing the whole furniture himself, and not telling Jack when she was to come.

Meanwhile he set about furnishing her room. There were three rooms on the first floor: Jack's, his own, and a small room. He turned himself into the spare room which was the smallest, and proceeded to repaper, paint, and decorate his old bedroom for his daughter. First, he bought a large and striking paper, in which sunflowers formed the principal part of the composition. Then he bought curtains, choosing a beautiful bright yellow chintz. He saw a toilette-table in an upholsterer's shop, and bought that, but would have nothing to do with the delicate pink hangings offered with it, selecting in preference a stony-blue stuff which he thought more likely to meet his daughter's taste. He purchased a large wooden bed, which he decorated with scarlet curtains. And he laid under all his purchases a pea-green carpet. This combination of colours he heightened by hanging up, all round the room, pictures which he carefully selected for their brightness of colour. It must be remembered that art education had not yet reached the level of Myles Cuolahan, and he had never seen the South Kensington. All his preparations completed, he wrote to Miss Ferens.

Jack came home to dinner one day at one o'clock. He entered the dining-room—which was also the sitting-room—as usual, in his working clothes, oiled, bedaubed with the spots that in Esbrough do blamelessly defile the robe of the earthly saint. He had not yet even washed his hands for dinner, and his face was smirched and begrimed. At the table sat Myles, in his shirt sleeves, pounding away at a piece of cold boiled beef. And beside him, looking bewildered, troubled, and pained, stood—a young lady. She was a tall young lady; she had hair so dark that it might almost be called black, but with a rich lustrous light upon it, which covered it with alternate waves of splendour and shade. She was standing by the table looking at Myles, in an attitude of doubt and uncertainty. She was *gracieuse* to look upon. Her features were perfectly regular, and, unlike most regular

features, they were touched with a soft look which turned beauty into loveliness, and make a figure of Diana an animated statue of Venus. Her lips were parted, and her eyes, full and tender, were half filled with tears.

Jack knew her at once. This goddess among maidens, this pearl of womanhood, this peerless girl, was none other than Norah.

The door was open, and he paused in the doorway, looking at her.

Myles heard his step, and looking up, banged the table with his knife and fork and shouted and laughed.

"'Tis he—'tis Jack. Jack, 'tis Norah—come home to us both at last. Kiss her, Jack—kiss her."

Norah said nothing. She looked at him as if there was something she did not understand. She had not been prepared for a rough workman. Was this Jack? Jack—a gentleman? Why, he was black with dirt; his clothes were black with dirt; he was a common man! Her heart fell like lead.

"I would shake hands, Norah," he said, "but I am fresh from the workshop. Let me have five minutes first."

He hastened to his room, changed his apparel, and went back. Norah understood still less. He was before her now, dressed like a gentleman.

"Now," he said, "if you are really little Norah, let us shake hands."

"If you are really Jack," she replied, with a little hesitation.

"I did not know you were coming to-day," said Jack, thinking of his first appearance.

"So I supposed," said the young lady a little coldly.

"'Twas myself," Myles cried. "I thought I would surprise you both. And why don't you kiss her, Jack? Sure, it is little Norah."

They both turned red. Then Myles, pushing his plate, now empty, into the middle of the table, called to the old woman to bring in the pudding; this he made short work of. Then he took down his pipe and filled it. Then he looked round at the pair, and laughed aloud.



"Myles," said Jack, "better light the pipe in the kitchen, and smoke it in the garden."

Myles looked astonished, but, perceiving at once that reason was in the injunction, retired.

"Pray, Jack," said Norah, "do you always have dinner in this way?"

"It is not dinner, Norah; it is only a mid-day meal. We stoke at one, we workmen. And we shall change a good many things now you have come back."

"And do you always stoke, as you call it, as you were going to do to-day, in that very dirty dress?"

"Norah," said Jack, "we shall change everything. If I had known you were coming to-day, I should have ordered things differently."

"Did you furnish my room for me?" asked Norah.

"No. Is it furnished?"

"Jack, I have always been told that you are a gentleman, by education as well as by birth. Could you not, in your spare moments, have found time to give my poor father some of the elements of what we call polite conduct?" Jack was silent. "I looked to you to do it. My father is quick to learn and to catch things; he only wants to be told."

"Norah, I never liked to tell him. When I first began my apprenticeship I had not the courage; as time went on I grew accustomed to things."

"Tell him now," said Norah, with a firm setting of her upper lip; "teach him now, or I will never forgive you."

She left him, more angry and hurt even than Jack had suspected, though his conscience smote him sore, and went to her own room, where she sat down and cried till her eyes were red. It was truly an unpromising commencement. Jack, whom she had pictured as her perfect gentleman; Jack, the *chevalier sans reproche*; Jack, her hero, came home at one o'clock, in the dress of a common workman, to a dinner served on a bare table by an old woman who made no pretence even to be clean. Her father, who loved her so much, who shed tears of joy when he brought her to his cottage, was absolutely ignorant of the simplest rules of civilised life; what should

she do, how should she live in such a barrack? And then she looked round her room for the second time. Yellow, gaudy yellow; red, staring red; green, a ghastly green; blue, a blue which seemed to dance before her eyes—all the colours of the rainbow, the colours of the spectrum, simple and unmistakable, drove sharp arrows into her brain, and made her head reel. Upstairs, the misery of the colours; downstairs, the misery of a room which was little better than a parlour in a pot-house. And Jack to take no notice of it all! There was the sting of it: no trouble or care about it at all, though he knew better things. Had he come to despise them, then? Did he think that things could go on anyhow so long as he lived with Myles Cuolahan? In her anger the young girl paced up and down the room, wringing her hands and crying.

All the afternoon she spent upstairs, for she did not dare to face the old woman and see the squalor of the sitting-room. At six Jack and Myles came home together, and her father called cheerily to her to come down to tea.

She dried her eyes, brushed her hair, and descended. Myles caught her by both hands and danced round her, laughing, crying, and kissing her by turns.

"Isn't she the real jewel?" he cried. "Isn't she the picture of her grandmother, the purtiest girl in all Pettigo, for whose eyes my grandfather gave up the Church, and very likely got another million years of purgatory. And well bought, too! Ye're like my own mother, alaunah, and I love you all the better for it. Ye've got her eyes, and her sweet, red, purty lips; and when you laugh, ye'll have her laugh as well."

He held her at arms'-length and looked at her as if she was a picture. Then he kissed her again. But she was like an unreal thing to him, and he kissed her doubtfully on the forehead, with a certain reverence upon him, as if it was not altogether becoming one in his position to kiss so beautiful a young lady. Then he placed her in his own easy-chair and sat opposite to her, with his hands upon his knees. Jack meanwhile stood awkwardly at the doorway, saying nothing, but wondering how they were going to manage. What were they to do with a young lady? And could this be the

child he remembered to have carried about?—who had slept in his arms; whom he had promised, boy as he was, her dying mother to protect?

Norah made tea. In his delight her father drank as many cups as she would give him, eating up, by way of stay before supper, something like a whole loaf of bread. Tea despatched, he swept, by a dexterous movement of his huge hand, all the crumbs on the floor—he had made a good many. Norah shrank back appalled. Then he tossed all the plates and cups together, carried them out of the room, and came back, with a smile of ineffable satisfaction, to finish the clearing-up by wiping the table with his own handkerchief.

“And what will we do with you now, alaunah?” asked Myles. “I’d like to do nothing but look in your sweet face all the day, and I’d be contented.”

“I should like,” said Norah, “to go for a walk with Jack, and see the place.”

Jack trembled, because he anticipated trouble; but he said nothing.

“Will you take me somewhere?” said Norah, when they were outside the house; “anywhere, if we can be quiet.”

Jack led her to some open fields—it was in early summer—where the path led across grass that the breath of the smelting-furnaces had not yet spoiled. Behind rose the smoke of the town, like a dome, for the evening was still; before them stretched far off the green hills, and on the left the ocean, half a mile away. Norah looked round and drew a breath.

“Your town is hateful and ugly,” she said; “your country is flat and ugly: why do you live here?”

“We live where our work forces us to live,” replied Jack. “It is not like Bedesbury. Do not judge us, Norah, by your first day. I did not know that you were coming, or I should have done something to make it a little different.”

“Jack,” she said, “you *must*! It would drive me mad! You know what I want.”

“I know,” said Jack, with a sigh. “But oh, Norah! he is so kind, so self-denying, so entirely true, that I never liked to say anything.”



"It is because my father is all this that I am not ashamed of him. But I must have more: I must have no one else ashamed of him. When I went away to live with Miss Ferens, if I had been old enough, I should have said, 'Jack, take care of my father.'"

"It was what your mother said, Norah. I have taken some care of him, perhaps; forgive me if I have not done more."

"I cannot bear it!" said the girl passionately. "Jack, it is your fault!—your fault! Remember, you were taken from the gutter like me. We are both of us children of the streets. And now you are a gentleman, and you despise my poor father, and have not thought it worth your while even to try and teach him the things he ought to know. It is cruel!—it is cruel! Did you never think of me? And if you ever gave me a thought, did you picture me brought up in a hovel, and living anyhow? My poor father! my dear father! my kind and affectionate father! O Jack! how could you?—how could you?"

She stopped: her eyes filled with tears, and her voice broke down. Jack could say nothing.

"Give me back my father," she said, "as he ought to be! Remember, Jack, if you do not help me now, I will never forgive you!—never!"

"Norah!—dear Norah!—forgive me and have patience."

"O Jack! there are three—only three of us together in the world—you and he and I; and I don't know which of us two he loves the best. But I cannot speak to him; and you must!"

"Norah! trust me a little. I can hardly realise yet that you are the little girl I used to run about with. Give us a little time—a few days. To-night your father shall do as he pleases; and to-morrow you shall see a difference."

They went back. Myles was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, smoking a pipe. He began to sing when they came in. It was growing dark, and one lighted candle stood on the table. Everything looked squalid. There were no pictures; nothing on the mantelshelf; above all, no flowers. The curtains were dingy; the carpet was dirty.

"Come and see my lathe, Norah," said Jack.

She followed him into a room which was a perfect contrast to the other. Jack lit the lamp, and showed her his books on the shelves, the lathe at which he worked, the cunning things he had made out of it, the designs which he had drawn, and all with a gentle, deferent air, patiently explaining one thing after the other, which went to the girl's heart. She looked him frankly in the face with her two deep black eyes, at length holding out both her hands, and saying softly, "Jack, I forgive you."

Jack laughed and took her hands. Why did he not kiss her? It troubled Norah; but still it was something to be on good terms again with Jack. In this room he was her hero again. Here he was strong, clever, brave; in the other . . . You see, it was not till that day that Jack even realised the true discomforts of his life, and with his thoughts full of his work, he never noticed those little eccentricities of behaviour which Norah's presence brought out so vividly. So that he was sheepish, silent, and abashed. Then, hand in hand, they went back. It was Norah who took Jack's hand, as if it belonged to her; not Jack, who would not have dared to take hers. Jack brought his little oil-lamp with him, which at least made the room look brighter.

"It does my heart good, children," said Myles, filling another pipe, the room already being heavy with smoke, and Norah trying hard not to cough; "it does me good to see you together, just as you used to be. Lord! Lord! if only Biddy could see you now! But she does av coorse from heaven, where they've got eyes like magnifying-glasses and telescopes. She was a Roman, poor Biddy. I'm a Prodesdan, you know, alaunah, like your purty self. I've been a Prodesdan since the day when I ate up Larry M'Breaty's collops. 'Ye murdherin' black Prodesdan,' said my father, powdherin' away with his walkin'-stick, 'I'll tache ye to be a Roman.' 'If that's the way, father,' says I, 'I'll be a Prodesdan.' And I bolted, and never seen him since. Norah, me darlin', can you sing?"

"Yes, father, I will sing to you some day; not to-night,

please." For her heart was so full and so troubled that she could not trust her voice.

"Your grandmother had a sweet voice," said Myles. "I should like to hear you sing like her. But you'll sing better, no doubt. Would you like to hear the song of the Colleen Rue, such as the poor old lady used to croon it out?"

"Sing it, Myles," said Jack.

Myles put down his legs to the ground, sat bolt upright, and fixing his eyes upon a black spot in the paper, began to sing *more Hibernico*, that is, with many and lengthened flourishes, the following classical ditty, an amœbæan strain, reminding the reader of Theocritus :—

"As I roved out one summer morning, a-speculating most curiously,  
To my surprise I soon espied a charming fair one approaching me ;  
I stood a while, in deep meditation, contemplating what I should do,  
But, recruiting all my sensations, I thus accosted the Colleen Rue.

" 'Are you Aurora, or the goddess Flora, Cleopatra, or Venus bright,  
Or Helen Fair beyond compare that Paris stole from the Greeks by flight ?  
Thou fairest creature, you have enslaved me : I'm in intricatives by  
Cupid's clue,  
Whose Gordian Knot and infatuations deranged my ideas for you, dear  
Colleen Rue.'

" 'Kind sir, be aisy, and do not taize me wid your false praises most  
jestingly,  
Your dissimulations and insinuations, your fantastic praises seducing me :  
I am not Aurora, nor the goddess Flora, but a rural damsel to all men's  
view :  
That's here condoling my situation : and my appellation is the Colleen  
Rue.'

" 'Was I Hector, that noble victor who died a victim to a Grecian's skill  
Or was I Paris, whose deeds were various, as an arbitrator on Ida's hill,  
I should rove through Asia and Arabia, and sweet Pennsylvania, seeking  
you,  
And the burning regions, like famed Orpheus, for one embrace of the  
Colleen Rue.'

" 'Sir, I am surprised and dissatisfied at your tantalising insolence ;  
I am not so stupid, nor enslaved by Cupid, as to be duped by your  
eloquence ;  
Therefore desist from your solicitations, as I'm engaged, I declare 'tis true,  
To a lad I love beyond all earthly treasure, and he'll soon enjoy his Colleen  
Rue.'



"Now all you deities whose power is prevailing, I pray to my feeble theme  
give ear;

Likewise, ye Muses, who never refuses, the wounds of Cupid I pray you  
hear;

In emigration to some foreign nation, is my determination, the world through  
In search to find a maid more kind than the blooming fair one, sweet  
Colleen Rue."

Myles finished at length, a little hoarse with the effort used, and looked round for applause. None came; only presently Norah asked, blushing, "Did my grandmother sing like that, father?"

"When she sang English songs, alaunah. We had a different style for the Irish. Listen now."

With a changed voice, and in a sweet and simple way, Myles sang, to Irish words, the plaintive air that has been hammered on so many pianos and ground out by so many organs that we have ceased to feel how beautiful it is, "The Harp that once in Tara's halls." But it was an old old Irish ballad long before Moore got hold of it.

"Sing like that, father," said Norah; "always sing like that, and never like the other song. Do you know any more Irish songs?" He sang one or two more that he remembered, which are in the "Irish Melodies," and then he remembered no more, and began to fill his pipe again. Jack significantly took out his watch, and Norah rose.

"It is almost bed-time," she said. "What time do you have prayers, father?"

Myles looked astonished. Jack hung his head guiltily.

"When you lived with Mr. Fortescue, Jack," the girl said severely, "you had prayers, I am sure."

"Yes, Norah."

"Where do you go to church, father?"

"I never go to church, Norah."

"When you were living with Mr. Fortescue, Jack, you went to church?"

"Yes, Norah."

"Father, as we cannot have prayers to-night, I suppose, I will sing you the Evening Hymn."

She took her father's hand in her own two hands—such

an immense great rough paw in hands so tiny and so delicate—and began to sing, in low voice first, that swelled and grew in tone and richness till it was as the voice of one inspired, the dear old Evening Hymn. Jack stood with bent head; Myles, his impressionable heart pierced by her voice, dropped tears upon his daughter's hand. When she had finished, while the air yet vibrated with the tones of her voice, she kissed her father lightly on the forehead and was gone. A minute elapsed, during which neither spoke. "Myles," said Jack.

"Jack," said Myles.

"We shall have to alter a good deal."

"So we shall, Jack. It isn't every one that gets an angel from heaven to live with them. What will we do with her at all—and what will we do with ourselves?"

Jack explained a few things which he thought required to be done to the internal arrangements of the house, and then he turned to the more delicate subject of personal behaviour. Myles understood directly. "I knew it," he said; "I knew that I was only a rough, common man. Tell me what to do, Jack; don't spare me—tell me all."

Jack took him at his word. When he had gone on for some ten minutes, trying to give Myles as complete a treatise as possible on the nature of good breeding, his pupil stretched out both hands in dismay. "O Jack, Jack! I'll never learn it! I'll never learn it at all—it's impossible! What will I do?"

Jack laughed and sent him to bed. Norah came down at eight. Jack was gone to his work. The father received her with a guilty look, as of one who has sinned, been found out, and is sorry.

"Norah," he said, "give me a month."

"Give you a month, father? What for?"

"To learn not to disgrace you: to make myself less common—so that you needn't be ashamed to sit in the same room with me."

"Father!"

"No, child, I'll take a month. And now, Norah, Jack

has told me all that you want, and you shall have it. The workmen are coming to-day to make this room proper for you; and there's a maid Jack has got already for you; and I'm going to smoke my pipe in Jack's room; and—and—What's the rest of it? Oh! you are to have the keys—here they are, and nothing locked up—and to order everything the same as you are accustomed to."

"You won't mind dining at six instead of having tea, father?"

"Not the laste in the world, Norah, if you'll give me my tea at one. And I can have supper in the kitchen, so as not to disturb you. And you'll sing to me, Norah, dear, won't you, every evening?"

## CHAPTER V.

"**I** AM here," Norah wrote to Miss Ferens, a few days later, "in an atmosphere very different to that of dear old Bedesbury. My dear, I never guessed before how wise you are, and what a lot of things you know. Everything is just as you said it would be, and exactly what you did not say, but what you meant, and what I understand now. My father and Jack have been living, not nicely at all, as I expected, but *anyhow*. I've no other word for it. It was too bad of Jack, who knew how people ought to live, and I have hardly forgiven him yet for it. My father showed me what he calls his bank-book, the book you have kept for him for so many years. He has never looked at it once, poor fellow, because he says the sight of figures makes him ill, and was astonished when I told him how rich he was. I have had a spare room furnished as a dining-room, so that we are now able to conduct ourselves in a decent manner. As for my bedroom—oh, my dear, if it did not give me the headache every time I go into it, and if my father was not so proud of it, I should laugh all day long over it. Poor dear father! It is only to you and to Jack, of course, that I can write or say anything that may seem to look like laughing at him. If I



try to laugh I begin to cry. The furniture and hangings are all colours—yes, all colours—red, yellow, blue, green, pink, rose, and purple, and every one a separate lump of colour, so that each in turn strikes you full between the eyes like a blow from Jack's great hammer which he keeps in his work-room. Of course I put out the light directly I go upstairs at night, and dress as quickly as ever I can in the morning to get out of it. When you come to see me, dear, please not to laugh.

“There is no cathedral at Esbrough, but only two or three churches, which I have not seen yet. I look forward with such longing as I cannot tell you to a Sunday and a talk in quiet Bedesbury. These two wicked men—only it was all Jack's fault, who ought to have known better—never had prayers even till I came. In the morning Jack is at work at six, and my father and I have them together, but in the evening we all three worship together and sing a hymn. Jack has got a beautiful voice, and my father, when he can be persuaded not to ‘humour’ the air, has a very good ear, and perhaps will be got to sing some day. Do you know what ‘humouring’ the air is? Wait till you come here, and I sing you the ‘Colleen Rue.’ Only, I must sing it before my father, or else I shall feel guilty of laughing at him. He sings all by himself when he thinks no one is listening. This morning early I caught him singing this pretty composition in the garden:—

‘The sun on the streamlet was playing,  
The dewdrop still hung on the thorn,  
When a beautiful couple was straying  
To taste the mild fragrance of morn.  
He sighed as he breathed forth his ditty;  
And she felt her breast softly glow:  
O look on your lover with pity,  
Sweet colleen dhas cruiskeen ra mo.’

He ‘humoured’ the air, and was enjoying himself tremendously, when I put my head out of the window. ‘Is it you, alaunah?’ he cried, turning very red, for the poor dear is always afraid, since Jack told him things, that he should do something not quite right. ‘I was forgetting where I was,

and thinking I was on the road again, where if you don't sing, you feel lonely. And are ye happy, Norah, darlin'?'

"That is always his refrain to whatever he says—'Are ye happy, Norah, darlin'?' It makes me sad to think that he loves me so much, and I try to find out something to do for him more than I have done—in fact, I have done nothing—to deserve it.

"The day before yesterday came your piano, and the pictures, and the books. I had to explain all the pictures one after the other to my father, who sat in wonder while I told the stories as well as I could. Then he looked at the books, and expressed his intention of reading them, every one. And then he wanted me to play. I refused, telling him to wait till after dinner—we dine when work is done, now. So he went to his work of collecting, which Jack says is mostly talking to his friends—'Every one,' Jack says, 'loves Myles Cuolahan.' I think it is a great thing to be loved by every one, and am proud of my father for it. And at six they came home and we had dinner. I order dinner now, of course, and the old woman is helped by my little maid, a good girl whom Jack found for me among his workpeople. After dinner, when my father was going to smoke his pipe in Jack's room, I told him to stay and I would play something for him. So he stayed, and Jack stayed, and I played first of all, 'The Harp that once;' and then I sang as many of the Irish melodies as I knew, and my father danced and cried. Ah! the Irish are the people who *feel* the strongest, after all. I think even the lovely Scotch airs, which are like the most perfect expression of sadness, must have come from Ireland, and if I were a learned person I would write a book to prove it. You can prove everything so nicely in a book; and then people write long articles to show how clever you are. When will you write a book, dear? I made Jack sing. He blushed very prettily, and sang to my accompaniment. I tried him with one or two German songs, and he caught them at once. He knows German, and French, and Italian, besides a great quantity of those perfectly useless things which men learn in order to make themselves out superior to women, such

as Latin, Greek, mathematics, Euclid—whatever Euclid may be—and things that end in ology. Jack is a very handsome boy, I think; at least he is handsome to me; and he is a boy to me, though he is nearly six feet high, and has got those ornaments to his face which men get when they are twenty-one, and which must be extremely uncomfortable things to wear. As for his blushing, I like Jack the better for it. Do you know, dear—let me whisper—I think the sex that blushes most is not ours. Just give your attention to this point, and let me know your experience. I do not blush: I do not know any woman who does: as for raising a ‘blush to the maidenly cheek of innocence,’ that is all nonsense, for if the maiden was innocent what should she blush for? I do not believe in blushing, except in a man. Now, Jack blushed when I praised his funny things in boxwood and metal, which he makes out of a machine all wheels and whirr and oil. Also he blushed when he began to sing, and he blushed when I asked him about prayers. All this shows three things: that men who are not past the age of shame blush when they are guilty—that is when they have neglected prayer; also when they are afraid they are going to be ridiculous—that is when you ask them to sing; also when you praise them for things they are ambitious to do well—that was when I told Jack how clever he is at wheels and whirr. But they do not blush over things about which they are indifferent—as when Jack reads German and French like English and cannot see that he is a good linguist. He is out of his apprenticeship, and is working on at the factory, waiting to see what will turn up. My father has a very good salary for his collecting work, and as he is the most inexpensive of men in his personal habits, we do very well. My dear, my father is a gentleman. Remember that. He has been a hawker, and is a collector, so he will never be a gentleman to any one except to Jack and to me. You will promise to burn this letter, please, and then I will go on. You have promised, because you always do anything I ask you, like the kindest of dears. Well, you know there are certain little points in which—in which a canon is superior to a cobbler and a prebendary to a



pedlar. Jack has undertaken the management of these, and the result in two days is surprising. But that is very little of itself: my father is a gentleman in his forbearance, his self-denial, his anxiety to sink himself, and his activity to amuse you when he thinks you ought to be amused. My dear, he is a gentleman.

"Yesterday Jack took a holiday, and drove me over to call on Mr. Fortescue. He is the nicest of old clergymen. He knows you, Miss Ferens, and knew your father. What I like him best for, next to his courtly behaviour and really perfect manner, is the love he has for Jack. He looks at him as he moves about the room; he asks him questions; he makes him talk; he fusses about his health; and yet he never seems to weary one with it, and talked to me as to an old friend. When we came away he kissed me, saying he was an old man and took the privilege of age. Why do men want to kiss girls? It seems to me a curious mental deformity, something like the pig's tail, which is too short to answer any practical purpose. What gratification do they find in it? Of course I like my father to kiss me, because it shows me how much he loves me; but as for other men, it is quite ridiculous. However, Mr. Fortescue took my face in his two hands and kissed me on the forehead and on the lips, and said, 'God bless you, my dear,' in a soft voice. And then he looked at Jack. Why was he moved? And why did he look at Jack? And why did Jack blush? I am to go again and see him. He asked me to go and stay with him; would it be right or wrong? Pray tell me, because there are some things which one never knows. There is right and wrong in the Commandments, but there is nothing said about going to stay a week in the house of an old clergyman. He has a housekeeper, a fat, motherly, soft sort of woman—you know—one of the kind that makes you think of jam, and puddings, and perhaps veal cutlets. She asked me after my father, saying, with a funny sort of a sigh, that he was a most superior person. I think she expected me to be a sort of gipsy fortune-teller by the way she looked at me.

"We had the most lovely luncheon, with strawberries and

cream, and some curious wine out of a long bottle of brown glass—German wine—but I forget the name. Jack drinks wine with Mr. Fortescue, but very little. I think the dear old gentleman likes wine very much, for he held his glass up to the light and rolled it about, and then he tasted it, and then he rolled it in the light again, and then he turned up his eyes, and said to me solemnly, ‘Young lady, we have much in this world to be thankful for—much to be thankful for.’

“After luncheon a carriage drove up to the door, and the formidable Mr. Bayliss got out of it, with his daughter, Miss Ella Bayliss. Jack introduced me, and Miss Bayliss looked at me in a way that I have not yet made up my mind about. I mean whether it was curiosity or surprise. ‘Miss Cuolahan,’ Jack said, ‘the daughter of my old friend and guardian, Mr. Myles Cuolahan.’ ‘And the ward of my old friend, Miss Ferens, of Bedesbury,’ said Mr. Fortescue. That was very kind of him. ‘Perhaps you remember Prebendary Ferens, of Bedesbury, Mr. Bayliss, who wrote the commentary on Habakkuk.’ ‘Ho! ho!’ laughed Mr. Bayliss, rolling himself about, ‘as if I ever read a commentary on Habakkuk.’

“However, then we began to talk. And then we had archery on the lawn, Miss Bayliss and Jack and I. Of course, I beat them both; but Miss Bayliss beat Jack, who is, like all men, curiously deficient in things which, like archery, require real skill and serious thought. Do you know, Miss Ferens—do not think me a gossip—but I am *certain*—*certain* that Miss Bayliss is in love with Jack. I saw her looking at him, and he is not in love with her, because I saw him looking at her, and oh! there was such a difference. Mr. Fortescue asked them to stay to dinner, and they stayed. And then, for it seems that the day is a sort of open-house day with Mr. Fortescue, and that everybody calls upon him on Wednesday, another arrival. A gentleman, this time, who rode out. Mr. Frank Perryumont, son of Captain Perryumont, the *other* great man, Mr. Bayliss being the first great man.

“He was pleasant to me, and said a great many things which he intended to be complimentary; of course I received them

with great gravity. He is not handsome, like Jack, nor so tall and strong, but he is pleasant-looking. He has dark hair, bright eyes, and sharp, delicate features. He was carefully dressed, and he wears a little moustache. He is an Oxford man, asked after two or three of the Bedesbury curates, the latest arrivals among your poor despised 'innocents,' and then began to quote poetry. As he is no good at archery, I suppose poetry is his strong point. I am not quite certain, but I think that when we went away at tea he squeezed my hand as I got into the carriage. I shall wait till I see him again before I say anything about it. What would you do if your hand was squeezed? You see it is a difficult question, because a man can always say that he only shook hands with you like everybody else, and then what *are* you to say in reply? I did not like to ask Jack as we drove home. Such a pleasant drive, dear, in Mr. Fortescue's dog-cart, with no servant behind. The bright moonlight, and the soft summer air, and the cry of the grasshoppers, and before us the long stretch of the sea—it was almost too beautiful. I think we hardly spoke a word all the way. 'What have you been thinking of, Norah?' asked Jack when we got home. 'What have you, Jack?' I replied. 'You have said nothing to me all the way.' 'I was thinking of my new valve,' he said, 'and I believe I have got over the difficulty.'

"There is a wretch for you—and I thought he was enjoying the beautiful summer air. At least, however, he was not thinking of Ella Bayliss.

"At present I have had but one caller, a lady named Mrs. Merrion from a house across the road. I wish you were here to advise me, dear, for I do not like her. She is a widow; and she put her handkerchief up to her eyes, though I do not know why, because there were certainly no tears to wipe away. She is, I should think, about thirty; but she may be more, because she paints. Her voice is soft, and her eyes are large and soft, and she is soft all over; but so is a tiger-cat, my dear. I may be wrong, and perhaps I shall write quite the other way next week, but that is what I think now. I do not like her. Jack, she says, she has known a long time.



‘He is almost my own boy,’ she said with a sigh—why did she sigh?—‘though I am certainly not quite old enough to be his mother. And you are his sister, dear Miss Cuolahan.’ ‘No,’ I said, rather snappishly. ‘I am not his sister at all. We are not relations.’

‘Now to anybody else I always say that Jack is my brother, as of course he is. But I was out of temper. I do not know why. ‘Oh!’ she said; she always said ‘oh!’ to everything. ‘Jack always speaks of you as his sister.’

‘And then she asked me to go over with Jack and have dinner. I suppose I shall have to go. But of one thing I am quite certain, that I will not make that woman a friend. Why does Jack go, then, as she says he does, every week? After she had gone away, another woman came—Mrs. Bastable—such a funny woman. Mrs. Merrion’s companion. I like her better. ‘I came to look at you, my dear. Lord bless my heart! You are a young lady. Ay, ay, ay, of course Jack is a gentleman. That’s only right and proper for an Armstrong.’

‘Then I got half angry and half inclined to laugh, and I said, ‘If it is proper for an Armstrong, it is proper for a Cuolahan of Connaught.’ ‘I knew your father, my dear, when he’—— ‘But you did not know my grandfathers, Mrs. Bastable, when they were princes of Ireland.’

‘Now, there was a pretty thing for me to say, was it not?’

‘Mrs. Bastable wagged her comical head, which had a bonnet stuck upon it all askew. ‘Let me set your bonnet right for you, Mrs. Bastable,’ I said. And so I put that straight, and then I pulled her shawl round and tied her bow properly, and she really looked a respectable woman. ‘Who are you, Mrs. Bastable?’ ‘I’m Mrs. Merrion’s companion,’ she said; and then, looking all round, she whispered, ‘I’m her second cousin when anybody calls and I’m caught with her. When I’m alone with her I amuse her. When Jack comes to dinner I’m the cook, and she says I’ve got a sick headache, or else that I am gone out to have tea. When we go to church I’m the companion. Oh!’

‘It was a very different ‘oh’ to that of Mrs. Merrion’s.

‘Don’t you say anything, my dear,’ she went on, in a nervous and agitated manner. ‘Your father was a friend of my husband’s. He’s a good man: my husband was not. My dear, never you marry a man that can mesmerise you, because if you do, and he finds out that you are a clairvoyong, all your happiness is gone. I like your face, my dear. You are a little like your father; but where did you get your small hands from? Let me come over and talk to you sometimes. It will be a charity. Do let me. There’s things going on—oh! I know, and I won’t have Johnny Armstrong’s son ruined for life. But don’t you talk, my dear; and let me come over, and I’ll tell you when the time comes.’

“Well, you know, this is all very mysterious, and I suppose she will come. I think she must be rather mad, judging from her bonnet, and the way she rambles from one subject to another, and her talking about clairvoyance.

“And now I must stop; for I have spent all the afternoon writing, and my head aches.

“Oh!—as Mrs. Merrion would say—there has just come a superb footman with a letter. My little maid Ruth opened the door and brought it to me. ‘Mr. and Miss Bayliss request the pleasure of Miss Cuolahan’s and Mr. Armstrong’s company at dinner on Thursday the 20th, at half-past seven,’ and a note from Miss Bayliss—

“‘Dear Miss Cuolahan,—Forgive the uncereemonious invitation, and do come with your brother.’ That is Jack, I suppose, and I must say it is a little impertinent. ‘We shall have only the Perrymonts and a friend of yours from Bedesbury.’ Who is my friend from Bedesbury? Write to me, dear, a great long, lovely letter.—Your own NORAH.”

## CHAPTER VI.

IT was two days after Norah’s visit to Mr. Fortescue, and breakfast-time with Mr. Bayliss. The great man had eaten his great breakfast, for he was gifted with a noble

appetite, and was preparing to drive into town. His daughter Ella, as fresh and rosy a young lady as might be seen anywhere in the three Ridings, had poured out his coffee and finished her own, and was now sitting in a meditative attitude. In the depths of those blue eyes lay the thoughts, unspoken, that contained the whole of divine philosophy. Never were eyes so deep, so lustrous, so full of secret and hidden meanings. Only the eyes were silent.

"Papa," said Ella, reflecting, "I was thinking last night about Miss Cuolahan."

"Ay, ay, Ella, what about her? As pretty a girl as I ever saw."

"Do you know that she belongs to the very first set in Bedesbury? All the county people visit Miss Ferens, and all the cathedral people. The Dean goes there at least twice a week. The Bedesbury men are all raving about her—how absurd!"

"The daughter of my collector," said Bayliss, with a little glow of satisfaction. "Yes; the daughter of a man who was once a common hawker, till I took him in hand. One of the privileges of wealth, Ella, is the power of lifting other people. Myles Cuolahan is an honest fellow, but common, very common. His daughter seemed to me ladylike. I don't know how women look upon her."

"She is ladylike, papa, and I think we should take her up."

"Do you mean that we should call upon her and ask her to the house? After all, Ella, we must observe some of the distinctions of rank."

"I do not know that we need call, papa, but we might ask her to come with—with her brother, Mr. Armstrong."

"Different thing about Armstrong. He is the son of my old unfortunate partner; and everybody in Esbrough knows the Armstrongs. And she is not his sister, you know, whatever people say."

"No, papa, but she is exactly the same, as she told me. And it is romantic of her giving up the beautiful life she had at Bedesbury and all the county society to come and live with her father. I think we might ask her."



"Well, Ella, have it your own way. Only mind, Norah Cuolahan is what people call a beautiful girl. Some girls would be jealous of her."

Ella laughed. "I shall not be jealous of her. People will not compare us. We contrast, you see; she is dark, and I am fair. She sings contralto, and I sing soprano. She is animated, and I am quiet. Oh! I am not jealous at all about her."

"But perhaps Frank Perrymont"—

"Oh!" cried Ella, a little impatiently, "Frank Perrymont is a donkey, with his poetry and nonsense. I'm sure I don't care what Frank Perrymont thinks."

"Then I do, Ella. However, you shall have your own way, whatever happens. Ask them whenever you like. Let them come to dinner. And get a few people to meet them. I hate your half-and-half dinner parties, with four people at a long table, and your voice sounding hollow in the big room. Get a dozen people at least. The Captain hasn't been for a long time, ask him—and Frank, of course; and, Ella, you won't be unkind to Frank if he should spout a little of his poetry, will you?"

Ella coloured. She knew what her father wanted. "I shall not be unkind, papa. Then we will fix next Wednesday, and I will write the notes this morning. I think it will look well, papa, taking up Norah Cuolahan. I shall make a friend of her, and the Esbrough girls will tear their eyes out for rage and spite. It is a pity that we cannot suppress her father altogether. But he does not expect to be asked, I suppose?"

"He expect?" said Bayliss. "The collector of my rents expect to be asked to my table? Hardly, I should think. But Cuolahan is a very sensible fellow. We need have no fear about that. I knew him years ago—that is, I was able to be useful to him on more than one occasion."

That was true, inasmuch as Paul Bayliss, Johnny Armstrong, and Myles Cuolahan had frequently propped each other up, on the way home, arm in arm, after a convivial night. But these things Ella Bayliss did not know. She had learned, with great readiness, the lesson that there are

some things important to be forgotten, and chief among them the small beginnings of the Bayliss family. Also the desirability of lifting the Bayliss connection into county rank, a task as yet not achieved. She met these magnates at Captain Perrymont's, but with all their superior wealth, and the attractions of her own blue eyes and faultless features, she had not yet succeeded in making them call at the Hall. Perhaps Norah Cuolahan would help. Jack Armstrong had brought Mr. Fortescue, a man of undoubted good family. At Mr. Fortescue's there was the chance, sometimes realised, of meeting with people a little above the Esbrough folk, who thought and talked about nothing but money, and did kotoo to her father as to the Mikado of Japan. For he was the incarnation of success.

"I had a curious report brought to me last night," said Mr. Bayliss, as his carriage drew up to the door, "about young Armstrong." Ella coloured.

"He stays sometimes in the engine-room after hours, and he has got to work by himself—I always said he was a genius—and the men are suspicious."

"What are they suspicious about, papa?"

"What are hands always suspicious about? They are afraid he is inventing something. You know he has already invented two or three little things. Hodder, the foreman, told me of it; says the men are talking it over; they think he has got hold of a contrivance that will lessen the number of hands and the price of labour—confound them! I only wish he would. Hodder says there is a strange man among them, who has always plenty to say when they meet in the evenings. We can't afford a row, with prices what they are and orders plentiful. But I suppose it is no matter of mine."

"But if Mr. Armstrong *has* invented something, papa? Would it not be a great thing for him?"

"For him? Well, I don't know, Ella. As things go, great things fall to those who have the money to use them. The capitalist, my dear," he continued, with a roll of the tongue, "commands the markets. He buys the labour of the hands as cheap as he can get it; and he buys the genius of

mechanicians as cheap as he can get that. If young Armstrong, which I very much doubt, has invented anything worth having, I dare say I shall hear of it. And then I shall buy it of him."

If it had been said of any one else, Ella Bayliss, trained in the school of capital, would have thought nothing. As it was, she had a faint fluttering of doubt, as if something was not quite right. "If Mr. Armstrong is clever and invents things, surely he ought to get rich," she said, turning rather red.

"Ella, my dear," said her father, turning sharply upon her, "you may admire Jack Armstrong as much as you like; and you may amuse yourself with him. All the same he will be my servant all his life, and he is a pauper, unless Mr. Fortescue leaves him his money. My daughter is not going to marry a pauper. And when the time comes, my dear, I've got the right husband for you." Then he strode out of the room, swore at the grooms in the porch, and drove away.

Ella sighed, sat a little longer reflecting on the parental admonition, which was not the first of the kind she had heard, and then wrote her prettiest notes of invitation. Mr. Bayliss walked straight to the engine-room, where he found Jack as usual.

"Come into the office. I want to say a word to you, Armstrong," he said.

Jack followed him. Bayliss took up a few papers, looked at them, and then turned to his apprentice.

"What is this I hear, Armstrong?" he asked. "Hodder tells me the men are suspicious of you. They think you have invented something. Is that so?"

"Yes, Mr. Bayliss, that is so."

"They think you have devised a means of lessening the number of hands. Is it true?"

"Partly true. At all events, the cost of production."

"Well, that is something, at least for owners. I am on the side of the owners, Armstrong," he said, laughing frankly. "Come now, let us hear it, this secret of yours; and I shall be able to tell you if it is worth anything."



Jack drew himself a little together. "It is because it is my secret, Mr. Bayliss, that I cannot tell you. I have been at work on it every day for the last three years."

"Every day in my engine-room and with my machinery, Mr. Armstrong," said Bayliss.

"No; every evening in my own workshop, and on my own lathe," said Jack.

"Young man," said his employer sententiously, "I hope you are not ambitious."

"Mr. Bayliss," said Jack, "do you consider that you have done well in the world? But of course you do. Pray, were you not ambitious?"

Bayliss shifted his ground. "Well, well, we are all ambitious, perhaps. And you have your way to make. Still, as an old friend of your father, and your own friend, too, Armstrong, I might have expected to find a little confidence."

"I am not insensible, sir," said Jack. "And to show you that I am not, you shall have the first offer of my new machinery, as soon as the patent is taken out."

"You are going to take out a patent, then?"

"Mr. Fortescue takes it out for me. I am not at all afraid that the secret will be guessed. Only I am sorry that any suspicion of it has got into the heads of the men. Some one, I do not know who, has filled them with all sorts of suspicions. Yesterday I was attacked, going home at night, by a fellow who fired at me. But I think it was only blank cartridge. The day before I had stones thrown at me. To-day none of the men will speak to me. What am I to do?"

"Confidence, Armstrong, might enable me to advise. Are you afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid. It is not pleasant to have stones thrown at you, and pistol-shots, perhaps, whistling about your ears after dark. But I am not afraid. The hands will come round—only I want to find out who has set the men upon me."

"Pistol-shots are something; stones are nothing. Young man, I have had stones thrown at ME. It was when I was twenty years younger than I am. And I caught the man

who did it. I gave him a hiding, and next morning he was picked up with two ribs and an arm broken. But pistol-shots——” Bayliss rang the bell.

“Send Hodder.” The foreman came.

“Now, Hodder, what the devil is all this? Here’s Armstrong been shot at, and the men won’t speak to him. Who’s at the bottom of it? By George, if I knew I’d make short work of him!”

“I don’t know, sir. I’ve tried to find out. The men are very angry. There’s a strange fellow——”

“What the devil has a strange fellow got to do with me and my men?”

“Nothing, sir. But then he is——”

“Then go and fetch him. Bring him to me—do you hear?”

“I don’t know who he is, nor where he lives, nor anything about him. But the men have got hold of him, and he knows them all. He has filled them with stories of new machinery and young Jack Armstrong—beg your pardon, Mr. Armstrong.”

“Who is the stranger, Armstrong?” asked Bayliss.

“I do not know, sir,” answered Jack. “I know of no stranger. And as for the invention that is in my mind, it need not lessen the number of hands a single one.”

“But it will lessen the cost of production?” asked Bayliss.

“Yes—the cost of production.”

“Hum! Hodder, look after Mr. Armstrong. See that he is not exposed to any attacks. Tell the men that, if necessary, every hand shall be dismissed, and may go to the devil, if they don’t keep quiet and hush up their absurd rumours. Do you hear? And, Hodder, you are a sensible fellow: find out this stranger, and, by gad! I’m a justice of the peace, and I’ll cool his heels in chokee for a month, and warm them on the treadmill afterwards. We’ll talk about this matter again, Armstrong. I confess I don’t greatly believe in your invention; but there may be—yes, there may be something in it. I’m not going to have my factory, anyhow, turned into a bear-garden. Perrymont may do as he likes in his, but I

am master here, and I will be obeyed, by gad! And the hands shall find out that!" So, with more swelling words, the potentate dismissed them.

Jack returned to the engine-room. On leaving the works at six, he found the hands drawn up in a double row outside the gates. They allowed him to pass through them in silence, save for threatening looks and a few hisses. He was followed by Hodder, the foreman, who kept looking round him as if in search of some one commencing an overt act of violence. "What does it mean, Hodder?" asked Jack, as they came to the end of the lane of threatening faces. "What have I done to them?"

"Lord knows, if you don't, Mr. Armstrong. Sure you ought to understand the hands by this time. You've been one of us, so to speak, for seven years, though a gentleman born and——"

"Never mind that, Hodder. What does it mean?"

"It means some one—I think it's that fellow down from London—has been egging them on. The hands are suspicious, always. They can't bear the sight of machinery."

"Well, if it wasn't for machinery where would they be?"

"Old machinery they don't mind, because they're used to it; but it's the new machinery that they're afraid of. You see, Mr. Armstrong, they're afraid of you. It's got about that you're clever; they say that you spend your evenings over books, and that you are for ever at work with your lathe at night. They remember the improvement you effected two years ago."

"Why, you old idiot, the improvement saved the life of a boy every year at the very least. Perhaps my own life."

"They don't want their boys' lives saved," replied Hodder. "They've all got large families."

"Do you mean to say they would like their children killed, when a little care would save them?"

"Don't put it that way, Mr. Armstrong. Say that they've taken the chance themselves, and they can't be got to see why their children shouldn't do the same. Then there was the new bucket for carrying the metal. Whose invention was that?"



"Mine, I suppose."

"Yours. And two men can do now what it took six men to do before. One word more. Do you know this man, a man from London, who hangs about the public-houses where the hands go, and drinks with them, and makes speeches to them?"

"No."

"You ought to know him, because he's your enemy."

"I learned when I was a boy," said Jack, "that the Latin word for enemy meant stranger at first. Do you think that the English word for friend means enemy?"

"Well, a man wouldn't hate you if he didn't know you," replied the other. "That man hates you, so he knows you. I saw him just now behind the rest, pointing at you with his long finger, and trying to hide his face with his pocket-handkerchief. He's got a queer face, that doesn't seem to fit with his black hair, all puckered and crowsfooted like. I doubt him, Mr. Armstrong—I doubt him. And I shall keep my eyes upon him. And, Mr. Armstrong, you're a young man, sir; don't breed bad blood in the hands. Mr. Bayliss is a masterful man—terrible masterful he is. If the hands do you a mischief, they'll all be turned off—every chap will be turned off. And the starvation will be on your back, not mine. I've warned you, Mr. Armstrong. Be as clever as you like, but don't make any more inventions, or it will be the worse for all of us. You see," he added in a plaintive sort of way, "it's all we've got to go upon. I shan't suffer, because I'm an old hand and there's hundreds under me. But it's for the rest to cry out. The orders come thick and plenty, God be thanked! There never was such a time for the iron trade. There never was such a house as Mr. Bayliss's; but the profit all goes into his hands. Prices go up, and work gets brisker, but wages don't increase—wages don't increase, sir. And all the profits go to the owner. Think of this, Mr. Armstrong. Don't cut down the hands."

"Hodder," said Jack, "you're a good fellow. I declare to you, upon my honour, that the invention I am going to

patent will not lessen the number of hands, so far as I can see, by one. It will lessen the cost of production."

"The cost of production—eh?" said the other. "Well, we are not interested in that. Now, I'll give you a word of advice, Mr. Armstrong. *Don't tell him.*" He looked up and down the empty street. "Don't tell him. He'll take it and use it for himself if you do. Sell it him, and he'll give you the best price of any man. Paul Bayliss is the cleverest man out. What he can't get for nothing he buys. And when he buys, he gives more than any other man, because he never buys unless he knows that it will be worth his while. Good-night to you, Mr. Armstrong."

Jack went home, perturbed. But Norah was waiting for him, fresh, bright, and gay as a rosebud, and they had tea and music. And after tea Norah came and sat with him, as she did most evenings, amid his "wheels and whirr," talking about Bedesbury and telling her pretty stories of Bedesbury life and the quiet cathedral close.

Enemy? Who could be the enemy? For Jack had almost forgotten the summer night spent floating down the German Ocean, and the wild eyes of Cardiff Jack. He went to bed at the usual time. While he was undressing a great stone came crashing through the window, and fell, caught by the blind. He picked it up. Round it was tied a piece of paper with the significant words, "Deth to traters!" He put paper and stone into a drawer and got into bed, thankful that the blind was down, but perturbed about this singular outbreak of feeling.

But in a low public-house where Mr. Bayliss's hands were wont to congregate in the evening, there had been a meeting that evening, for harmonic purposes ostensibly, at which there was much wild talk. Rumours were afloat: the men's minds were excited: there was nothing certain: but young Armstrong's name was freely bandied to and fro. "Who was it," they asked, "that invented the safety-valve for the boys? Why shouldn't the little devils take their own chance as their fathers did? Who was it improved the carrying bucket? Who was for ever prying about the factory, climbing the

blast-furnaces, poking into the engine-rooms, making drawings, and writing notes in a pocket-book? Young Armstrong. And what did it mean? Improvements in machinery. Fewer hands and lower wages—curse him!”

A chorus of unpopularity. And yet, a month ago, who so popular as young Jack Armstrong? He had a word for everybody. He was a workman among the rest. Esbrough folk, who remembered the Armstrong name, said he ought to be a king over them all. There was no one so strong, no one so handsome, no one so clever, no one so ready to laugh and make jokes.

And then a silence fell upon them as one man rose up amid them and made a speech. It was the man of whom Hodder had spoken. A middle-sized man, with shaven face, red and swollen nose, and black hair—hair so black as to contrast strongly with the lines of his forehead. He had been in Esbrough for a month, and was seldom seen in the daytime; in the evening he associated with the working men, drinking and smoking with them. He said he was the delegate of an American society, and was come to study English factories in the interests of the workmen. He talked big, but, as they speedily found out, he knew nothing about work. Then they began to mistrust him, but he disarmed mistrust by taking another line. He was the Political Economist, he said. And he began to inquire, suggest, and insinuate. To-night he made them, as usual, a speech. It was a crafty speech. He spoke as if Capital and Labour were two enemies, whose hands ought to be at each other's throats. Capital, he said, ground labour down, exacted the uttermost hours of work, and paid with the smallest farthing of money: labour, the down-trodden, should rise. Let capital have the interest due, say two and a half per cent., and let labour take all the rest. No word here, you see, of skilled labour, of risk, enterprise, education. That was to go for nothing. And then he turned the conversation on machinery.

“There are some men,” he said, “who spend their lives, slaves as they are, in devising means to make the pampered capitalist richer. They get educated, learn the secrets of



the engine-room, and then they are paid to invent something that will halve the men and double the profit. When these men are capitalists themselves it is bad enough. It is ten times worse when they are young men, whose life is all before them, who might be a help to their own class."

"Jack Armstrong isn't our class," cried one. "He's a born gentleman."

"I name no names, my friend," pursued the orator. "I say only that what is treacherous and bad in a master is fifty times as treacherous and bad in a servant. Who is Jack Armstrong? I know no one of that name. I only know that it is three weeks and more since I came here; that three weeks ago, in Mr. Bayliss's factory, I overheard a young man——"

"Whatten sort o' young man?" asked another.

"A tall young man: a handsome young man: a fellow with brown curly hair, a moustache, and light beard, and brown eyes."

"That's him, damn him!" murmured the crowd.

"That's him, is it? Damn him with all my heart. I heard him then, whoever he is, telling some one whose face I did not catch, because his back was turned to me——"

"Hodder belike."

"Telling him that it was all ready; and says he, 'Where there's ten hands now, there'll be one then.'"

A storm of hisses, groans, and oaths ascended unto heaven, and amid the tumult of them the assembly dissolved. The orator, who slept in the house, went up to his own room. Here he locked the door carefully, pulled out a bottle, and, lighting a pipe, sat down on the bed to think. As it was a hot night, he took off his hair and sat bare-skulled, or not quite bare-skulled, because his head was covered with a closely cropped thatch of silvery-white hair, the effect of which, standing up in little bristles of an eighth of an inch or so long, was extremely weird and unpleasant.

"I've notched him this time," he said to himself. "He won't escape me now, if the men can only be held back for a while. I've had nothing but bad luck since that day when

he sent me to prison for the letter. And when I thought I'd murdered him, I went from bad to worse. If it hadn't been for that one stroke of luck that put me into respectable clothes, where should I be now? What good chance sent me here? It's the fourth time I've been here since I murdered him—I can't keep away from the place—damn it—since I tried to murder him. And I wish I had done it—I wish I had brained the cub when he stood before me. I've had the horrors about it. Whenever the drink is too much for me, I see the little devil tied to the rib of the old ship, and turning his big brown eyes to look at me lying on the grass. I wish it had been really done, for all the murders that ever were could not make a man more miserable than this one which wasn't a murder at all. And I can't keep away from the place. And after prowling about the place for years, fearing to hear something about him, to find, after all, that he's alive and well, the little devil, and grown up to be a man—and a gentleman. A gentleman—pah! A gentleman; and Myles Cuolahan with a black coat and a collar. It's sickening."

He blew out the light, took a drain from the mouth of the bottle, without the preliminary enfeebling of the spirit by dilution which weaker brethren are constrained to perform; and, taking off some of his clothes, lay on the top of the bed, and went to sleep. In the middle of the night he woke with a start and a cry.

"Murdered? Drowned? Tied fast to the old wreck? I never did it. I never did it." And looking round, recovered his senses, and sank back with a gasp.

## CHAPTER VII.

"TWO evenings in Esbrough society," Norah wrote to Miss Ferens. "On Tuesday I dined with Mrs. Merrion, and on Wednesday at Mr. Bayliss's. As for the former dinner, there were no other guests besides ourselves, and we had what Mrs. Merrion called a French dinner. That is to say, it was as unlike the Bedesbury dinners, the dear old solemn things,

as you can imagine. We sat down at a round table, and Paulina, Mrs. Merrion's French maid, brought round an endless string of dishes. There was only one kind of wine, claret, which I have hardly brought myself to like, in spite of all you say about it. What men find to like in wine I cannot make out, unless it is sparkling moselle. I admit that I do like that. I found the evening very tedious. Perhaps I was a *gêne*, for the conversation did not seem to flow. Once or twice Mrs. Merrion began to talk about London, but she checked herself. Jack was not easy. And then I cannot like her. She told me her name was Adelaide, and begged me to call her Adelaide. Then she called me Norah, and said she had heard so much about me from my brother Jack. So he did think about me sometimes, after all; though I would rather he had not told Mrs. Merrion his thoughts. Then I called her Adelaide, and she called Jack by his Christian name. Why is it that I always get cross when any one calls Jack my brother, or when they call him Jack as I do? Of course he is my brother, but somehow I like to feel that I have him all to myself. Do you remember what I told you the other day, how Ella Bayliss is in love with Jack? My dear, I saw it at once, by the way she looked at him, and sat near him, and followed him about with her eyes. Besides, she lit up all over when he spoke to her. Please do not call me a gossip when I tell you that Mrs. Merrion is in love with him too. She paints, she is at least five-and-thirty, she has got great bold eyes, and she has not got the manners of a lady, and yet she dares to be in love with my Jack. Oh! I am certain of it. It makes me angry to notice the way in which women show their preferences, to say nothing of the absurdity of a person of Mrs. Merrion's age having any preferences at all. Men do not make themselves so ridiculous about girls. The other evening I was walking with Jack in the High Street, and we passed a bevy of factory girls. They had gone home and put on decent clothes, for the dresses they work in are really hardly decent, covered all over with grease and oil. 'There goes handsome Jack,' cried one; and then they all cried out, 'Come here, handsome Jack, and we'll



give you a kiss.' Isn't it dreadful that such things should be allowed? Jack only laughs and takes no notice. After the dinner we had music—that is, Mrs. Merriion asked me to sing, and I sang one or two German songs, and then she began singing French songs. I did not like them. The words were bright enough, but they seemed to mock at everything, and I said so. Mrs Merriion laughed.

"' *Jeune ingénue*,' she said, 'you are just out of a convent. You do not know what life means. Come to me and I will teach you.' 'We do not want Norah to be any different to what she is,' said Jack, for which I made him a little curtsy behind the woman's back. But oh! my dear, how glad I was to get away. And it seemed like going out of purgatory into heaven to walk out into the starlit air and breathe the fresh night breeze. Jack took me for a quarter of an hour into the fields, and we walked in the dewy grass, my arm in his, and he talked to me. Jack is 'tender and true;' the best of brothers you ever saw. 'Jack,' I said, 'promise me one thing.' 'What thing, Norah? I will promise you anything.' 'Promise me—promise me, Jack, that you will not marry anybody—anybody—or promise to marry anybody, without telling me first.'

"He laughed, but a little uneasily. 'That is too much to promise, Norah. But I promise you this, that when I do marry, you shall be the first to hear of it.'

"So we turned to other things. Jack showed me the stars, and we talked about the infinite distances of one star from the other, and the infinite spaces between them, and the black spaces in which no telescope ever invented can see a spot of brightness, and the good God who reigns over all, till my heart burned within me, and when I went to bed I knelt down and cried. All beautiful and noble thoughts seem to come from men—it is not fair to our sex—all except yours, dear; and even you would have been happy to hear Jack talk about science and order, and the great beneficence and ineffable wisdom of God. And yet, when I came here, he and my father were living without prayers, and Jack only went to church on Sundays with Mr. Fortescue. Why are not

men *afraid* of living so? It is the first time that Jack has really talked to me. Up to that night we fenced with each other, because it seemed to me that he, and my father, and I all talked different languages. Poor father! I have not yet learned his language, but Jack's I know. You told me once that we all ignorantly worshipped each from his own platform, which covered all the ground we could see. Do you know, dear, I think that is not ignorance, but knowledge. Jack's God is the great Contriver and Inventor. Jack's perfect knowledge of God means a perfect knowledge of the secrets of nature, and a perfect mastery over the 'wheels and whirr.' Mine—but I dare not say what my God is. I know what I ought to think Him, the God of all Love, but Jack has troubled my thoughts, and I seem not to think so much of His love as of His wisdom and power. Am I wrong, dear Miss Ferens? If I am, a day in Bedesbury with you and the cathedral will put me right again. I do not know what my father worships, because he is singularly reticent about it. He says he is a 'Prodesdan,' as the poor dear calls it, but what that is he has not yet told me. He hates a priest, he hates confession, he hates Lent, and for every hatred he has got a reason in his own history, which he is quite ready to tell you—the priest, because his father was bred to the priesthood, and if he had become a priest he, my father, would never have been born—and that is the funniest reason I ever heard; and confession, because he has never been to confession, and he is anxious to persuade himself that he has not failed in duty; and the observance of Lent, on account of Larry McBrearty's mutton collops, which made him a 'Prodesdan,' how, I will tell you another day. But no one can understand how quick and ready my father is at learning. He has already, thanks to Jack, the manners of a gentleman; he is learning how to speak; he *thinks* differently since I came home; and every day, I know, he has half an hour with Jack, privately, to find out what he lacks yet. You see, dear, he has the *feeling* of good breeding, which is everything. And when you come to stay with me, which I intend you to do before very long, you will learn how good a man he is. Above

all, I am anxious he should never be ashamed of himself. And, dear, there is one thing he told me the other night, only by snatches, and in a quick, jerky way, which showed how much he felt it. When he was a young man, long ago, he was tempted by intemperance—not much, I think, but a little—and then he took the pledge, and has never touched anything stronger than water since.”

At this point of the letter Miss Ferens put it down and reflected. Before going any further she wrote a note to Myles. “Do not,” she said, “tell Norah any more than is necessary about your past life. You have already, perhaps, told her that you were once inclined to be intemperate. Let no one know the whole extent of your inclination. Above all, not your daughter, if you value her respect for you.” Myles got the letter and read it, and walked about all day with an aching heart, fearing that Norah might yet find out what and what manner of man he had been.

“I always gossip about those I love, dear Miss Ferens, and if I were to write to Jack about you I should fill reams. Let me tell you about the other party, last night’s party. It was a much grander affair. Captain Perrymont was there, with his son. He and Mr. Bayliss are the two kings, you know. Then there was a Mrs. Appleton, an Esbrough lady, with her husband, a lawyer. I put her first because her husband seems nobody. And there were one or two other people, who were afraid of Mr. Bayliss. Jack calls them the Chorus, because they only echo what their host says. When Mr. Bayliss remarks that the weather is cold, one of them thinks for a moment, and then he remarks, ‘I quite agree with Mr. Bayliss.’ Or when Mr. Bayliss says that the selfishness of the working classes is beyond all understanding, the other wags his head, and adds that Mr. Bayliss is always right, but that the case was never put so clearly before. So, you see, the dinner went off in a sort of triangular way; that is to say, whatever Mr. Bayliss observed was repeated at either side of the other end of the table. I am learning Euclid—did I tell you?—and it was like an equilateral triangle, the angles at the base being each equal to the angle



at the vertex. Jack laughed when I told him that; if you laugh too I shall think it rather witty. However, Mr. Bayliss did not do all the talking, only the chief part. Mr. Frank Perrymont took me in to dinner. Captain Perrymont took in Ella, and Mr. Bayliss Mrs. Appleton. Jack and the Chorus walked in by themselves. I always used to laugh at Bedesbury when the curates, poor dear innocents, walked in by themselves, trying to look intellectual. You spoiled me for curates, my dear, and I can never respect any man in the Church under the dignity of a dean. Perhaps I might tolerate a canon, if he had been a Fellow of his college, and had written something that no woman can understand, but not a member of the inferior clergy. Mr. Fortescue is a rural dean, so that my conscience is quiet as far as he goes, and I respect him for liking Jack; besides, after all, though it is ridiculous, it *is* very nice to meet with an old gentleman who makes you a pretty speech, and then kisses you on both cheeks with a real and most unaffected pleasure.

"The dinner was grand. Salmon, and turtle soup, and all sorts of magnificent things. And wine of every kind. I had one glass of champagne. Jack, to my astonishment, drank a great many glasses of wine, and seemed to like them. Now, at home, we never have anything but water and coffee. And at Mrs. Merrion's he only drank two glasses. And next day he said he did not like the wine because it was corked. As all wine is corked, of course I thought he disliked all wine. When *shall* I understand men?

"What did we talk about! I sat between Frank Perrymont and the Captain. When the others talked about iron and machinery, and strikes, and so on, Frank Perrymont quoted poetry to me—such a lot of poetry—asked me if I liked Shelley, and got through a quantity of verse, of which I remember nothing, while I was eating my ice pudding. Then Ella Bayliss asked me how I liked Esbrough, and Mrs. Appleton asked me if I had seen 'our' friend the Dean. Do you know, my dear, I don't think she knows the Dean at all. I am sure he would not like her. Perhaps she has

seen him—in the cathedral. As I took no manner of interest in the talk, I was rather glad when Ella, who perfectly understands these things, gave the signal, and we left the men to themselves. ‘How nice it is,’ she said, when we sat down in the drawing-room and had our tea in our hands, ‘to get away from the dinner-table, and have half an hour to ourselves—isn’t it, Norah?’

“I forgot to tell you that before dinner she made me promise to call her Ella, and she was to call me Norah; so that was very nice and friendly. ‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘I should like everybody to leave the table at once, and then we could all talk pleasantly.’ ‘The gentlemen like to discuss politics,’ said Mrs. Appleton. ‘Politics!’ said Ella. ‘It is the claret they like to discuss. For, when I was a very little girl, I listened. There was not a single word of politics. Nothing but wine, and all about its colour and age, and stupid things like that.’

“Presently they came into the drawing-room—Mr. Bayliss last. He came and sat by me, and began talking about Bedesbury. There is something I do not understand about Mr. Bayliss. He is not at all like the vulgar millionaire that we read of in books and picture to ourselves. And yet he is ostentatious. He is proud of everything about him. He talks in a loud voice. I do not think he knows Bedesbury well, but he asked about all sorts of people. ‘I am afraid,’ he said so loud that I nearly jumped, ‘that you will find the society of Esbrough dull after that of Bedesbury.’ ‘I am not likely,’ I replied, ‘to see very much of it.’ ‘On the contrary,’ he continued, in a lordly way, ‘we hope that you will see a great deal of it. My daughter especially wishes that you will come here often.’

“What was I to say? Ella Bayliss seems very nice, but I do not want to go there too often, and I do not like to offend my father’s employer. I think of the story of the beggar-maid who became a princess; but I cannot remember any princess, except *Berthe aux grands pieds*, who became a beggar-maid. But that is something like my position. So I laughed and said he was very kind; and then he turned to

his daughter and told her, not asked her, to sing. 'Ella, my dear. Sing to us.'

"Ella smiled, and went to the piano. I followed her, glad to get away from the red-faced master of the house. Jack and Frank Perrymont came too. Ella sang an Italian song; one of the kind that requires execution. Then she looked triumphantly at me, and asked me to sing. So I sang an Irish ballad in the Irish words that my father taught me. And when I had finished there was Frank Perrymont positively with tears in his eyes. Jack was unmoved, no doubt thinking about his wheels. 'That is very pretty, Miss Cuolahan,' shouted Mr. Bayliss. 'Very pretty indeed. What is it?' 'Only an old Connaught ballad, Mr. Bayliss.' 'Ah!' he cried; 'your father taught it you. That is not Bedesbury work. Your father's ancestors were great people once in Ireland.'

"I laughed. 'You ought to be called the Countess of Connaught, Norah,' said Jack, 'if your grandfathers had known how to keep their own.' 'And as for you, Armstrong,' said Captain Perrymont, 'you ought to be called Jack the Disinherited, for your grandfathers certainly could not keep what they had.'

"All of a sudden I saw Mr. Bayliss turn pale, quite white, and shiver all over, as if he was going to fall. He was at the window, and no one saw him except me. I said nothing, but got quietly across the room to him. He was still pale, but was recovering. 'Are you not ill, Mr. Bayliss?' I asked. 'Shall I get you a glass of water, quietly? The others have not noticed.'

"He shook his head, and sat down silent. I stayed with him as if he was talking, and they went on singing. Presently he turned round, looking very much softer. 'You are a good girl,' he said. 'If Ella had seen it she would have made a fuss, and we should have had doctors and all sorts of things; a very good girl. I sometimes get a sudden turn like that. Anything brings it on. It is quite unexpected. Say nothing about it to Armstrong or anybody. A very good girl.'

"He took my hand in both his, and gave it quite a series



of paternal taps. I was very glad he did not, like Mr. Fortescue, assert the privilege of age. Perhaps he is not old enough yet, and is only waiting for a year or two more, just to turn his brown hair white. I should not like to be kissed by Mr. Bayliss. After that I sang one or two duets with Ella Bayliss, and then Frank Perryumont—I have got into the way of writing about him by his Christian name—made some very pretty compliments to both of us. I think I told you that he is a kind of poet—say, that he has indications of a tendency to poetry: and then we came away. Jack and I walked home; it is about a mile, and we had a talk, such a nice talk. I wish it was always eleven o'clock at night, and that Jack was always talking to me.

“He was not thinking about his wheels when I was singing, after all, though I thought he was. ‘Norah,’ he said, ‘you sing ten times as well as Ella Bayliss. She sings as if the words and the air were nothing, and the execution everything. Now, you sing as if you had lost yourself in the music.’

“Thanks to you, dear. ‘You should hear Miss Ferens sing,’ I say rather weakly. ‘I don’t want to hear anybody sing, except you, Norah.’ And then he was silent for a while. Presently he went on: ‘You do not know, Norah—you cannot think, what a change you have effected in our lives and thoughts. Your father is a changed man. He seems to have become suddenly refined in expression as well as thought. It is your doing, Norah.’ ‘No—yours, Jack. He told me so himself.’ ‘Yours: because, if you had not come home, I should have left him alone, just as I used to do, without thinking of the possibilities in his nature. And as for me, I used to think about nothing but my mechanics, and set to work every evening from seven to ten. A dreary life it used to be.’ ‘Except when you went to Mrs. Merrion’s.’ ‘Mrs. Merrion has been very kind to me,’ said Jack. I am sure he turned red—though, in the moonlight, it is difficult to see a blush unless you look quite close, and that, of course, I could not do. ‘I do not like her, Jack,’ I said very seriously.

"He laughed. 'Jack,' I say, 'I wish you would not go to Mrs. Merrion's.' 'I wish I had never gone there,' he replied moodily, for Jack. 'However, I dare say it will come right somehow.' 'What is to come right?' 'See,' said Jack—'there's a shooting star.'

"There were half a dozen, one after the other, like pale rockets, twinkling for a moment in the darkness and disappearing.

" 'Encore une étoile qui file,  
Qui file, file et disparaît.'

" 'That is Béranger,' said Jack, as I repeated the lines. 'I know the pretty poem. There are a dozen different ways of looking at the shooting stars. You may call them the souls of the dying, as Béranger did, or you may see in them the wasted powers of Nature, and try to solve the great problem of why things seem made for nothing. Norah, we shall find out, bit by bit, all the laws of the universe: we shall make disease vanish: we shall make most men reasonable, and lock up the unreasonable, so that everybody shall be happy: we shall live as long as Tubal Cain: we shall conquer matter and make the unknown forces our slaves—but we shall never answer that great difficulty, the waste of Nature.'

"I do not understand the least bit in the world what he meant. But he went on, and oh! my dear, I should like Jack to talk for ever. 'They talk about the perfectibility of humanity. Norah, we can't be perfect. There will always be the same tendencies to selfishness and luxury. We may educate, but that is little use. Men and women will only gradually grow better, and they never will grow best. There is a curve in mathematics, Norah—a graceful, beautiful curve—and there is a line which you may draw such that it grows nearer and nearer every moment, but it never touches it.' 'But it must touch it some time, Jack.' 'No, it never touches it—till eternity.'

"I pressed his arm and said nothing. 'In eternity the asymptote'—I asked Jack next day how he spelt it, and he showed me with a drawing of the curve—the asymptote touches the curve. Then the longing is realised: the bride-

groom meets the bride and tells her everything. My Norah,'—he called me his Norah—'we are like the bride, longing to know things. We learn a little here and there, but full knowledge and mastery are only to be gained—in Eternity.'

"We reached home. My father was sitting up for us, and I was full of solemn thoughts. He was reading, but he put away the book as we came in. 'You have had a pleasant evening, alaunah?' he said, taking my two hands in his, with his sweet affectionate voice. 'You look as bright as the flowers in May. And her beautiful dress and all. Jack, sure 'tis an angel from heaven come to live with us!'

"And then we had prayers, which my father reads now, and we went to bed.

"Oh! dear Miss Ferens, to you I can say anything, and I know I shall not be misunderstood. But it seems to me that my life is fuller and richer than it was at Bedesbury. The men with whom I live do not look on things as you and I did, but perhaps their views are broader than ours. Jack speaks from all his knowledge gained from books, but my father from all the knowledge gained from the world. And, somehow, there is a sadness in both. I am very happy, too happy, sometimes, if it were not for that odious Mrs. Merriion opposite, who sits at the window and beckons me to go over to her, and says horrible things about people and things. I wish I knew something about her. She never talks about her husband, and is always trying to tell me things that I know are wrong to hear about London. What a cruel misfortune it must be to have to live in London!—Your own dearest

"NORAH,"

## CHAPTER VIII.

THESE talks with Jack were few. Norah rarely succeeded in getting him quietly to herself. Worse than that, it seemed to her as if from day to day he avoided such evening walks and talks. His face was clouded at times; he would fall into moods of silence, or would retreat to his own room, whither Norah would steal, an hour later, to find him



standing idly over his lathe, silent, prepossessed, and melancholy.

"What is it, Jack?" she asked him one night. "You are changed in the last few days. Tell me what it is. Are you unhappy?"

"No, Norah. At least, I have no right to be."

"Are you vexed about the stupid men and their fancies?"

"Not very much—that is, of course I am vexed. It is not pleasant to be scowled at by a mob of angry hands, and to have stones thrown at you after dark. But it is all nothing, Norah. Don't fret about me. Tell me your own news. Are you going to the croquet party to-morrow?"

This was another thing. Ella Bayliss took into her pretty head the fancy that she could not get along without Norah; and her father, who had generally small sympathy with his daughter's fancies, encouraged her. So the girl was asked to all the parties of the Hall, and the young ladies of Esbrough observed, with an exasperation they hardly tried to conceal, that Miss Cuolahan, the daughter of quite a common person, upon whom no one would think of calling, was the chosen friend and associate of the great and fortunate Miss Bayliss. But people did call upon her—"carriage people," said the Esbrough folk. Captain Perrymont called, as well as Ella Bayliss. At the Flower Show the Bishop of Bedesbury was observed to single out Miss Cuolahan, and to shake hands with her as an old friend. Norah introduced Miss Bayliss, and presently the right reverend prelate drove off with them in Mr. Bayliss's carriage. And then some of them, taking heart, resolved on calling in person on this friendless princess who knew everybody. Meantime stories were told. People wagged their heads, and said that Miss Cuolahan, who had been brought up by Miss Ferens out of charity, behaved so badly in Bedesbury that she was sent back in disgrace to her father. But there came a call from Miss Ferens herself, who made a railway journey on purpose to remedy that little matter of bedroom furniture mentioned before, and to see that her child was in other respects properly looked after. So great was the public curiosity, that Mrs. Merriion, about

whom there was so much division of opinion, found her visitors suddenly multiply tenfold, in the mere hope of finding out something of Norah Cuolahan, whom she was reputed to know.

"They do say," said Miss Grundy, "that she was turned out neck and crop."

"Quite false, my dear Miss Grundy," said Mrs. Merrion. "I know the whole particulars. She left Miss Ferens of her own accord, to live with her father."

"Hum! I expect Mr. Armstrong had something to do with it."

Mrs. Merrion's eyes shot one look of lightning; but she answered with great sweetness. "No, my dear, that is not so. Do oblige me, as a friend of the young lady, by contradicting that statement. They are only brother and sister. Mr. Armstrong was adopted by Mr. Cuolahan, a most worthy person, after the sudden death of his father. No doubt you remember the accident."

"I was too young at the time," replied Miss Grundy, who was, indeed, not more than fifty or so. "But I have heard of it."

"Yes, Norah Cuolahan is now about eighteen or nineteen. Jack—I mean Mr. Armstrong—is twenty-two, and they regard each other in a fraternal way which is really quite touching."

"They do say," pursued the scandalous one, "that young Mr. Perrymont is in love with her. After the way he and Miss Bayliss have gone on together, *I* call it disgraceful."

"I do not know Miss Bayliss," replied Mrs. Merrion. "The widow of a general officer, I suppose, is not good enough for the daughter of a blacksmith. She has never called upon me, though I am her father's tenant. Mr. Bayliss has called once or twice. However, that is nothing; only, I do not understand how Miss Bayliss can maintain friendship with a girl who has taken away her lover. And so I prefer to believe that what they say is incorrect. Have you got any more 'they says' for me, dear Miss Grundy?"

"I have heard," she went on, "that Mr. Fortescue has

been seen calling there, and Captain Perrymont. Now, if that girl, with her fine airs, ventures to set her cap at one of those two, old enough to be her grandfather, and if they are donkeys enough to fall into the trap, they ought to be locked up in a lunatic asylum."

"I quite agree with you, Miss Grundy," said Mrs. Merrion. "Mr. Fortescue is about seventy years of age. What he wants is a well-preserved, single young person of fifty or so. Now, don't get up to go—so seldom, too, that you let me see you. But if you must, good-bye, dear Miss Grundy."

As for Mr. Frank Perrymont, it was no longer a rumour that reached the ears of that common receptacle of all stale rumours, the eldest Miss Grundy; it was notorious to all the town that his attentions to Miss Cuolahan were assiduous. Frank Perrymont. There were those, among the feminine youth of Esbrough, who preferred his slim form and smooth cheeks to the more manly charms, the rosy cheeks, and the Hesperian curls of Jack Armstrong. Frank Perrymont was susceptible. He had held flirtations, generally of brief duration, but long enough to raise wild hopes, with all the girls who had any pretensions to beauty whatever. He was poetical, and had written verses for most of the reigning beauties, which they would sing, till another, more fortunate, produced a copy of more recent date. Frank Perrymont, moreover, the only son of the Captain, was heir to a large fortune, while Jack Armstrong was heir to nothing but his brains. Only the factory girls retained, undivided, their affection for handsome Jack. For to them the gift of divine poesy had no charms, and they loved to look upon a man who was strong, masterful, and handsome.

"Come here, handsome Jack, and we'll give you a kiss."

The young ladies would hear them as they stepped along the street, and glancing at the young fellow who strode along with his head thrown proudly back, would secretly lament that the advance of civilisation made such an invitation from themselves out of place.

But Frank Perrymont was clearly in love with Miss Cuolahan.



"Do you see anything in her, my dears?" asked a younger Miss Grundy of her friends Miss Rose Backbite and Miss Blanche Crabtree.

"She is tall," said Miss Backbite, who was tall herself.

"So is a May-pole, dear."

"She has black hair," said Miss Blanche Crabtree, who believed in Christian names and was swarthy.

"So has a negress, dear."

"She has bright eyes."

"So has a poll-parrot, my dear."

"She has a strong voice."

"My dear, so has a drill-sergeant."

"But then her manners."

"Well, poor thing, what can you expect? Her father collects the rents for Mr. Bayliss. To me, indeed, it is the most incomprehensible thing in nature. Frank Perry mont, of all men in the world." And just then passed by Ella Bayliss and Norah Cuolahan, the one soft, sweet, and gentle, with large, pellucid eyes like a deer, and light flowing hair; the other tall, queenly, statuesque, noticing the ladies who were discussing her with just one glance of intelligence.

"They are talking about me, Ella," said Norah. "They are saying that my father is only a collector."

"O Norah! don't suspect dreadful things."

"Why are they dreadful? They are quite welcome to say so, if they please. What they know, poor things, is, that they are jealous and spiteful, and it makes them feel mean and small. Look, dear, what a lovely bonnet!"

Norah had, at least, one weakness: she had the instinct of dress. To dress in bad taste was impossible for her; not to be well dressed was torture. And it was not the least bitterness to the Esbrough girls that this stranger, who had come among them, dressed better than any of them.

"Tell me what you know, dear," said Ella, "of Mrs. Merrion."

"I have dined there. She was kind to Jack. That is all I know about her."

"Papa goes to see her, dear. Hush! don't tell any one.

He calls of an evening, after dark. What does he go there for? Is she pretty?"

"She has been—perhaps is still—with a kind of prettiness. But surely, Ella, you don't think" ——

"Never mind what I think, Norah dear. Only I won't have it, if I can help it. Look, here comes Mr. Armstrong with Frank Perrymont."

They walked down to the sea-shore, where an esplanade now stretched its way from the docks to that creek in which Jack had well-nigh passed through the gates of death. Ella walked with Jack, and Norah behind with Frank Perrymont. I do not know what the former pair talked about, but when they separated, Ella was silent and cross. Frank Perrymont talked about himself chiefly. He was not yet out of the stage of thinking that every young lady must be deeply interested in his proceedings. He told Norah how he projected a great poem, at the reading of which the hearts of the people should burn within them; and a great play whereat eyes should weep and bosoms should heave; and small poems for the multitude to sing about the streets, and so on; the fancies of a young fellow who thinks that conception is execution, and that all is easy to him who dares resolve.

"I tell you all this, Miss Cuolahan," he said, after finishing his programme, "because I like to think that you take an interest in my work."

"So I do, Mr. Perrymont, after a way. I like to find out what men think about, and it is a grand thing to learn that they have noble ambitions. Jack, now, thinks about nothing but his machinery and wheels. But then it is to serve the double purpose of conquering nature and making people more happy."

"Yes, but that is nothing compared to the delight of touching people's hearts, and" ——

"I think you are quite wrong, Mr. Perrymont," said Norah quickly. "To touch people's hearts—what is it but to waken a momentary sympathy that passes away and is forgotten? That is not the finest art. And even if it were, it does seem to me a miserable thing to pursue art in order to

get praise. I went to a gallery of paintings last summer with Miss Ferens, at Lord Overbury's. He had a few of the modern English school, touching little incidents, nicely painted. And away from these was a collection of copies; Raphael's Madonna, with the sweet, grand face that you could never tire of. And I thought of the modern artist standing by his little domestic picture, watching the people cry over the tragedy, and rejoicing in our sympathy. Then I thought of Raphael gazing at his type of womanhood, thinking in his great soul that he might have made it better—not knowing how good it was. The modern art looked so small beside it, Mr. Perrymont." She turned to her companion, blushing. "I have been talking to you as if you were Jack, or Miss Ferens."

"Go on talking," he murmured, with his dreamy eyes reflecting the light from hers. "Go on thinking I am Miss Ferens."

But she stopped. "No," she said; "what I mean is, that it seems a poor thing to look on art as a means of getting praise for yourself. Show me some of your poetry, Mr. Perrymont."

"Do you really take an interest in—in my verse?"

She hesitated a moment. You see, this young lady was quite new in the art of flirtation, and had been used to converse with the old clergymen at Miss Ferens's on quite an equal footing. But she was quick at learning, and it was evident that the young poet wanted to practise the commencements of the Art of Love. "I do not want particularly to see your verses," she said coldly. "If you show me any, I shall give you a candid opinion of them. Of course I do not mean that my opinion is worth anything."

"It is worth everything to me," said Frank in a low voice.

"Well, it is not amusing talking about verses and opinions, Mr. Perrymont, so tell me about something else."

He began, in a constrained way, to talk about something else. Presently he said, laughing, "Tell me, Miss Cuolahan, do you know a lady named Merrion who lives near you?"



"Yes, I know her. What of her?"

"What is she like? I find that my father knows her."

"Your father?" asked Norah, thinking she was in a dream.

"Yes—and—and—I do not know her, personally, and if my father is really going to give me a new mamma, though it's rather late in the day, I should like to know what sort of a one it will be."

"Jack knows best," said Norah, laughing. "He will introduce you if you please."

"No, thank you. At least not yet. Will you let me send you some verses, Miss Cuolahan?"

"For my candid criticism? Yes, and you may give them to Jack for me if you please."

"Let me bring them!"

"Certainly not, Mr. Perrymont. I am only at home to my *old* friends. You may come with Mr. Fortescue, if you please."

Norah and Jack walked home together. "Tell me, Jack," said Norah, "do you think that Mrs. Merrion means to marry again?"

Jack coloured violently. "Why do you ask, Norah?"

"Mr. Bayliss calls there, and Captain Perrymont."

Jack laughed. "It would be a good match for her. But no, Norah, Mrs. Merrion will not marry either of them. Of that you may be quite sure."

"I care nothing about it, Jack, only that I wish you knew less about Mrs. Merrion's intentions. Jack, I won't go there any more. I am unchristian about that woman. I dislike her thoroughly."

Jack made no reply. At dinner he was silent and absorbed. After dinner he went out of the room, and presently Norah, with a sharp pain at her heart, saw him go across the road to Mrs. Merrion's. Then she reproached herself. Jack had a perfect right to go wherever he pleased; she had been foolish in telling him her opinion about Mrs. Merrion: no doubt she was wrong—and so on. Reproaches which had the effect of making her only the more disappointed with Jack, and the more angry with herself. Jack, for his part,

did not spend a pleasant evening. He was met in the hall by Mrs. Bastable, flushed, dishevelled, and panting, as from a recent struggle in which she had got the worst of it. She caught her breath, and smoothed her hair as she opened the door to him. Then she took his hand in hers and held it a moment, looking at him with those vast eyes of hers, in which there was no speculation save when she was clairvoyante.

"Don't anger her to-night," she whispered. "Not as you did the other night. She's awful now."

Jack shook her off, and strode into the drawing-room. On the hearth-rug stood Mrs. Merrion, in a statuesque attitude, an unstudied *pose* which violent women, like savages, assume naturally when they are in a rage. Mrs. Merrion was in a towering rage. "Sit down," she gasped, "sit down, you. I shall be able to talk to you presently." In a few minutes she came round a little.

"You were in a rage when I saw you last," said Jack.

"That was with you. Now it's with that idiot, that cow, that—oh, that Keziah Bastable!"

"Ladies ought not to fall into fits of passion," said Jack.

"Ladies, in fact, do not."

She started to her feet again, the blood surging into her face. "How dare you!" she cried; "how dare you say that I am not a lady?" Seeing that Jack replied not, she went on in a low voice: "Oh! I see that you are come to quarrel with me again. I know why—I know why. Jack Armstrong, it was all very well to call her your sister. Brother and sister! Pah! the girl loves the ground you tread upon. You love the very sound of her voice and the rustle of her dress. But you don't get off so easily; you don't get rid of me!"

"First of all, I shall say what I came to say. I forbid you, Mrs. Merrion, on any pretence whatever, to call upon Miss Cuolahan again."

"Oh! I am not good enough for her, I suppose."

"That is it. You are not good enough."

"What a thing it is to be perfection, like Miss Cuolahan! How grand to have a brother so careful of your virtues, like

Miss Cuolahan! And oh! how charming to be kept from wicked people, as Miss Cuolahan is! But what shall we do, Jack, when your promise is kept, and when we are married? Do you deny your promise? See!" she took a pocket-book from an open desk. "Here it is—ah! in black and white, signed and dated. 'I promise to marry Adelaide Constance Merrion, unless, of her own free will, she gives me back my promise. John Armstrong.' Do you dare to deny your promise?"

"No—I do not deny it. But I am not going to marry you yet. Meantime you shall do me as little harm as possible."

"What harm have I ever done you?"

"This, that you made me sign that paper. Think how you did it. It was on a soft warm night in autumn, when we sat here in the dark at the open window."

"I was at your feet, Jack, at your feet," she added, her eyes sparkling.

"Yes, you had been playing—the scent of the flowers, the perfumes of your dress, your eyes glowing in the twilight, the touch of your hands—I don't know—I was drunk with incense, I think."

"No, Jack, you were drunk with love, and you leaned forward and took my face in your hands and kissed me. I remember—I remember. And then I threw up my arms and dragged you down, and kissed your handsome face a thousand times. That evening you gave me the paper, because I said that I could not live without your love. Jack!" she cried once more passionately, throwing herself at his feet again. "Jack, it is all true—oh! I will do anything, go anywhere, live anyhow, if only you love me!"

"But I do not love you. I have told you so before."

"Then if only you let me love you. If I have you, all to myself, what do I care whom else you love! What if you yearn for all the women in the world, if only I hold you tight in my arms! Jack, Jack, I've got your promise, and I'll never let you go. Never—never—not for a thousand Norahs. See, I hold you tight—so tight that you shall never escape."

She clasped her arms about him and strained him tighter



in her embrace. Jack gently pushed her away. "Your arms make me shudder. What sort of love is yours, if you could endure to marry a man who loves another?"

"I don't care what sort of love it is. I care for nothing. Say what you please, love whom you please. But you are mine, and mine you shall continue to be."

"How can I be yours?" asked Jack, dragging himself free from her. "I tell you I love you no longer. I never did love you. I hate you now. I hate you when I think of your rage and passion: and I hate you most when I feel your arms round my neck. Is it possible for two people to marry when one hates the other?"

"Possible!" echoed Mrs. Merrion. "I could tell you things; but—Jack, don't be angry with me. It is not my only fault that I love you!"

"No."

"What is it more?"

"It is this: that your thoughts are . . . . Why do you make me say such things?"

"You shall not say these things. I will say them for you. You thought me, when first you met me, one of those spotless creatures whom young men see in place of women. You have learned to know me exactly as I am. I am fond of admiration, and proud of my good looks. I use rouge and powder. I dress myself well—as well as I can afford. I am fond of luxury and comfort, so I have furnished my place as luxuriously as I could. I like good things to eat and drink, so I have delicate French wine, and good French cookery. I like to have things pleasant, and to keep them pleasant. I don't mind if the stories I tell are not always accurate. As I am not a saint, I try to find out all about other people, to show that they also are not saints. Yes, Jack, I am a woman who has told you what all women are."

"They are *not* all like yourself," said Jack, pacing the room. "It is false. Where were you brought up? In what miserable school did you learn the lesson that all women are like what they have made you? Tell me, what was your early life, that you have fallen so low?"

Mrs. Merrion laughed. "My early life? My Jack, I have told you a hundred anecdotes about my early life. Some of them I have even told twice or three times without much alteration, so that they, at least, must be true. All women are like me, only they hide it from you and from each other. But, Jack, all women are not like me in one thing—they are cold-hearted, they are incapable of love. I can give you love for love, warmer than the pale, cold moonlight that your miserable Norah would give you."

"Silence!" Jack groaned. "Dare to name that girl to me again, and I will break even my solemn promise. Love!" he echoed; "always love! And what love? All she knows of love is that it means kisses and champagne. That is her love! That is her heaven. See here—I must keep my word, but it shall not be yet. There are things to be done first. It depends upon you whether the word is kept to the letter or not."

"Do not threaten, Jack," she replied calmly. "You have got to marry me, you know, and that is enough for once. And you are not the only string to my bow. There are others who are not quite so insensible to the attractions of the fair widow."

"Yes!" said Jack. "I heard to-day Mr. Bayliss comes here, and Captain Perrymont."

"The two kings of Esbrough. They both come. Is it not delightful? Not together, you know, but separately. Is Jack jealous?"

"No! if I become jealous it will be when I have good cause."

"And there is some one else," said Mrs. Merrion. "Perhaps this will make you jealous. Yesterday I met Mr. Cuolahan, and asked him in. He has a fine eye for a pretty woman, and came at once. Why did you not tell me he is almost presentable? He sat down there and had a cup of tea, and presently began to talk. 'The late Mr. Merrion, ma'am,' he says." Mrs. Merrion acted poor Myles's compliments in the spirit of a finished comedian, so that even Jack, vexed and angry as he was, began to laugh. "'The late Mr. Merrion, ma'am, was a small man, I presume?'

'He was,' I said, wiping my eyes. You know, Jack, it's manners to wipe your eyes when you speak of the late departed. 'He was a small man, Mr. Cuolahan.' 'Ay—and a thin man?' 'Yes, the poor General was a very thin man,' I said. He wasn't, you know, Jack, but I like to please people always. 'I knew it,' said Mr. Cuolahan. 'I knew it. It's always the way. The little, thin, hatchet-face chaps, with legs like spindles, get all the beautiful women, and the strong, able-bodied poor divils have got to go without. And what's the use of a leg like that, Misthress Merrion, ma'am, and me a widower and no one to admire it?' I laughed—you know, Jack, my taste in jokes is rather low—and he went on. 'Misthress Merrion, ma'am, you'll pardon me, but it's many a long year since I saw a creature any way your aiquil. It's ripeness and richness. I did think once that Mrs. Bastable was a fine woman.' 'Mr. Cuolahan!' I said; 'why, she's got a face like a cow.' 'Hush!' he answered, in a low voice, and creeping to the door cautiously, opened it and peeped out. Then he shut it again and came back, whispering, 'Hush! Misthress Merrion, I've seen many a handsomer cow.' And then I encouraged him, you know; and when he went away, the impudent rascal had the audacity—Jack, you really must be jealous—he had the audacity to kiss the hands of your future wife. Does that stir you, Mr. Grave-airs? Does that fire your blood?" Jack laughed, but was too angry still to be calmed by a scene of modern comedy. "Come, Jack, you are cross to-night. Go away back to your family prayers. When you want champagne and kisses come to me. I'm of the world—worldly. But I'm better fun than the saints. Good night—now, don't let us quarrel—my future husband."

## CHAPTER IX.

JACK went home, the most miserable man in Esbrough: it was nearly twelve. As he stood at the door with his latch-key in his hand, a woman wrapped in a long cloak accosted him.



"Jack Armstrong, they mean mischief. Take care!" she cried, clasping his arm. "They mean mischief over there," pointing in the direction of the town.

Jack coolly lifted her chin with his hand in order to look at her. "I don't know you," he said. "Tell me who you are, and what mischief is meant."

"What does it matter who I am? I'm one of the hands: it's the iron works' people that mean you mischief; I was there to-night, and heard them. They'll attack you to-morrow. Jack, be careful! Get Hodder to go about with you. Tell Mr. Bayliss. Have the police out. The men are maddened by that chap—him with the long tongue, who tells them lies and cheats their senses. He has persuaded them that you are going to turn them out of place. Jack, don't be in the way to-morrow!"

"Who are you, then?"

"Look at me, and you won't know me. If I tell you my name it's no use to you, because you wouldn't know it. But I like you, Jack. If I was ten years younger, I should love you; and there's many a girl in Esbrough this night, high and low, from Ella Bayliss in her silks and satins, to Polly in her greasy factory petticoat, as 'ud up and follow you, through better, through worse, if you only lifted your little finger. And I'm Esbrough born, and know about the Armstrongs. But I'm not in love with you. I'm better than that—I'm grateful to you. Jack, I've got one boy—only one, thank God! and you saved his life for him. I can't call you Mr. Armstrong; you are only Jack to me—my beautiful Jack; and you saved my boy's life in the cruel engine-room, and mine I'd lay down for you this minute."

She took his hand in hers, and kissed it. He gently drew back, and laughed. "My good woman, you exaggerate a little service. Now I know your name, and the name of your boy."

"He is a man now. He is sixteen; and he has forgotten what you did for him. He will be among the worst to-morrow. Ah! his mother remembers. But I've warned you, sir. And oh! take care—take care!"

"I'll take care. Good night," said Jack, letting himself in.

She disappeared in the darkened street, and Jack went up to his room. Next day he went to his work as if nothing was about to happen. As he walked about the engine-rooms and through the foundry, the men shrunk back from him, right and left, as from a leprous man. His blood mounted to his cheek; he held his head higher, but he said nothing. One of the boys in his department came sidling up to him—all the boys were fond of him—and whispered, "Mr. Armstrong, don't go out at the great gates to-night. Go by the back way. The hands are going to murder you."—"Thank you, my little chap, for nothing," said Jack; and then, repentant for a word that might seem rough, stopped and stroked the boy's curly head. The little fellow looked up at him sadly, and went his way half crying.

Mr. Bayliss himself that day went round the works. It was no sauntering that he affected, like Captain Perrymont, as he was wont to say. Mr. Bayliss went the rounds as one who knew how things ought to be. He superintended everybody, from an overseer to an engine-boy, knowing exactly what every man's work ought to be. And he bullied all impartially, except Mr. Armstrong. On this occasion he had half an hour's talk with Jack in the open yard, at which the men looked askance. After this they both visited the engine-room together, and Hodder the foreman was called in. And when Mr. Bayliss walked away, it was, men said to each other, with a joyful countenance, as of one who has learned something to his advantage. Something to their employer's advantage, the men inferred, was something to their own disadvantage. It seems an odd result of civilisation, but this undoubtedly was the feeling in Mr. Bayliss's works. As a matter of fact, there was nothing new, and no jubilant expression on the master's face. What had passed was extremely simple. No reference was made to Jack's invention at all, and the only question about the men was simply—

"Any more stones, Armstrong? Any more pistol shots?"

"No more, at present."

"Good. Hodder, remember what I told you. The first man who attempts violence goes—goes at once—and goes to prison. As for that orator fellow you told me of, I look to you to bring him into my clutches for conspiracy, or inciting to break an Act—never mind what Act—and then I'll make an example of him."

It was six o'clock when Jack left the works, a few minutes after the bell rang for dismissal. Just as he was putting on his coat he was joined by Myles Cuolahan.

"I was passing by, me boy," said the collector of rents, "and I thought it was a month since I walked home with you. Let's come along together and talk of Norah."

The sole delight of Myles, in fact, was to talk of Norah.

"There's all the boys," meaning the hands, "gathered about the gate to-night, Jack, talkin' and blatherin'. Is there anything wrong with the hands?"

"I suppose they think there is," said Jack. "Now, Myles, I am ready."

Just before they reached the gate he turned to his companion, and looked at him for a moment. "Myles, we are in for a row. The men think I have made some improvement in machinery which will drive a lot of them out of work. It is not true, but they think so. For Norah's sake, keep yourself out of it."

"I will, Jack; I will," said Myles, grasping his trusty stick, and shaking into order the muscles of his arm. "I'll keep myself out of it, bedad, and I'll put thim into it. Holy saints! It's nigh upon ten years since I had a fight. Shall we begin it, Jack, or shall we wait for thim?"

"For God's sake, don't begin it. I am glad to have you with me, Myles. They shall not say I am afraid."

They passed through the gates. The last stroke of the bell clanged as they left the works, and the heavy gates were shut after them. There was a small side gate also, generally closed, and never used by the hands.

As a rule, the men went straight away home, where they "fettled up," had tea and a smoke, and then went out again to their clubs and taverns. On this occasion they were



assembled together outside the gates in knots and circles, talking, gesticulating, and swearing. Among them ran and leaped the boys; and these seemed to be the worst of all, so eager were they for the row to begin, so brutally anxious for the fight, so callous, and so cowardly. There were four hundred men outside those gates. They meant mischief: they meant revenge: they meant, though they would not whisper it to each other, they meant Murder. The older men were the most quiet. They looked at each other sadly, as if they were sorry for the business. But the young men had no such thought. They thought of the weekly wage; they panted to be revenged upon the man who was going to turn them out. There was a quick and feverish movement in the crowd; occasionally a stone would fly through the air, earnest and promise that some one should be hurt. And there was a hollow and hungry roar. None of the men had lit their pipes. That was a bad sign. None of them was striking off homewards. That was another bad sign.

"Begorra, Jack," said Myles as he caught sight of the mob, "'tis worse than Donnybrook. A great fight we shall have, entirely."

At sight of Jack the roar changed to a yell, and in a moment they closed round him, shaking angry fists in his face and shouting menaces. He, a little paler, threw back his head proudly and faced them all, one hand on Myles's shoulder to keep him back.

"What is it, lads?" he shouted, above the din. "What is it I have done to you all?"

"You've ruined us, Jack Armstrong," cried one of whom the rest seemed to leave the post of spokesman—a serious, grey-headed man. "You've ruined us with your engines and your books."

"How have I ruined you?" asked Jack.

"You've made some'at as will turn us out—ay, every man of us, into the street. You, that's a gentleman by birth, as all the world knows, and an Armstrong of Esbrough—you to come among the hands and steal away their bread—shame on you, Jack Armstrong! Shame upon ye!"

"We haven't done with you yet, fine Jack Armstrong," cried a voice from the crowd.

"Listen to me a moment," cried Jack.

Myles pushed himself to the front. "Stand back, all of you," he roared, pushing them from him to clear a space. "Stand back, and give a man fair play. You Englishmen! I'll fight the best man among you. Come." He brandished his great fist, but Jack seized him by the arm, and held him back.

"We will have no fighting, Myles. Leave me to speak. Who is it has told you lies?" he shouted. "Where is the man that has made speeches against me, and told you that I meant to ruin you all? He is a liar! Bring him here, that I may tell him so to his face." There was a stir in the crowd. Esbrough men love not strangers.

"I have heard of him. He has been among you for a month, and you believe him against me, who has been five years working among you, and one of you."

"You don't drink with us, lad," said the spokesman, shaking his head solemnly.

"No, I don't drink with you, and I won't drink with you, and you know why. But I work for you. If I invent a machine that shall lessen your labour while it shall require as many hands, is that a mischief? If I make your hours easier, your work lighter, your wages heavier, is that a mischief?"

"Leave us as we are, Jack Armstrong—leave us as we are."

"Yes; leave you as you are!" he cried, losing his patience. "Leave you as you are—to spend your hard-earned wages in the pot-house, to have no pleasure but drink, to labour like slaves your twelve hours a day, to grow up in ignorance and die in ignorance, to have no thrift, no care for the future, no hope, no brightness in all your life. Men, you only have one life in this world. Leave you as you are? No; I will not!"

For a moment only the men were silent. Then some one, probably a boy, began to hoot and cry, and the tumult began again, louder than ever. The hands were there for a row—

were they to be balked of their prey by a few fair words? They were there to give vent, in an act of violence, to the suspicions and jealousies which had been growing so long—were they to resign their just and righteous revenge for a few promises? Stones began to fly about. Then they closed in. Myles, in front of Jack, tried to clear the way, but in vain. The crowd pressed closer. The threatening faces threatened more determinedly. Jack found himself with his back against the wall; in front of him Myles, gesticulating and defiant—a wild scene which neither will forget for a lifetime. Sticks were brandished in Jack's face: faces, red with an aimless rage, glared in his eyes, and exploded with oaths, less dreadful to a mechanical engineer than to a lady: the boys yelled and danced; and outside the crowd stood a man, leaning on a stick, with fierce and bloodshot eyes, his head trembling, his lips trembling, his cheek twitching, his hands trembling, in his eagerness to see the fight begin. And when Jack saw this man, there flashed across his brain the thought, for a moment, that he had seen him before—somewhere before.

Where a French mob beats an English mob is, that there is always some Frenchman ready to begin; very seldom an Englishman. This fact saved Jack's life. His safety was assured by a second event. The heavy gates behind them swung open, and the crowd reeled back, for before them stood—a girl. Alone, save for Hodder, the foreman, who had opened the gates for her. "It's Norah Cuolahan," cried one or two voices, and all were still while a man might count ten.

There was nothing theatrical in her attitude as she stood facing them all, wrapped in her light jacket and morning dress, with the hat in which, for Norah loved bright colours, stood a scarlet feather. In her hand was no weapon, but in her eyes was an infinite scorn; and as she moved towards her father and Jack, the men fell back right and left, and left the path clear. Myles sprang to his feet as they retreated. His coat was torn, his face was bleeding. He dragged the rags from off his back and fairly danced, the



spirit of a hundred fights within him, as he shouted, "Come an! Come an! I'll fight the biggest of ye. Who fears to talk of Ninety-eight? Who'll fight Myles Cuolahan? Come an!" A light hand touched his arm. "Father, we will have no more fighting."

The stones had not ceased flying through the air. Jack's face was cut and bleeding. He still stood, his back against the wall, silent, pale, and resolved. It seemed as if he did not see the girl. Myles dropped his fists and spread out his hands, and Norah turned to Jack. "You here, Norah?" he cried. "Quick, get back through the gates, and take your father with you."—"And you, Jack?"—"Let them kill me. Let them do their worst. Do you think that I will run away? Ha! Cowards, cowards, who threw that stone?" For one, aimed at him, struck the girl full upon the mouth, and her lips were bleeding. Jack sprang like a madman upon the mob, followed by Myles. But, at sight of the girl bleeding before them all, a revulsion of feeling seized them, and there was a cry of shame and the silence of a sudden repentance.

Norah stanchd the blood from her cut lip, and faced the crowd with a bearing that had no more fear than that of Jack or her father. "She's a plucked 'un," they murmured.

"Englishmen!" she cried, "you dare to call yourselves Englishmen! You set four hundred together upon two unarmed men! Go home to your wives. Tell them that it takes four hundred hands to fight two men. Go to your public-houses. Tell the landlords that their drink has taken the manliness out of you, and that you must be two hundred to one before you dare attack a man. Now clear the way, cowards, and let us pass."

"Go back through the gates," said Hodder. "Go back, while there's time."

"Ay! go back through the gates," said one of the foremost. "The men behind are mad."

"I shall not go back through the gates," shouted Jack. "Make way for me. I shall pass on my way among you all." The murmurs began again.

"Bring that man here," cried Hodder, pointing to the stranger, who, on being thus prominently brought into notice, sought refuge in retreat. "Bring that chap here. He's the man that done the mischief. Bring him along, you men there. I know you all, and you know me. We've had enough of this."

Two or three seized the stranger by the arm and led him, reluctant as he was, to the semicircle, backed by the wall, where the little group, with Jack in the centre, stood fenced in by the angry hands. At sight of the stranger, Myles's face was seized with a puckering. He strode up to the man, peering curiously in his eyes; then he went back again to Jack.

"Faix," he said, "it's mighty quare. I know him, and I can't remember him. I've seen him, and I can't tell where."

Jack looked at him steadily. As he looked the man's eyes lifted for a moment upon him. In that malignant glance, where all evil passions were mixed, he recognised his old enemy, almost forgotten. And he laughed aloud. The first spokesman pushed the man forward.

"Now, lad," he said, "you've allus been pretty free of your talk about Mr. Armstrong behind his back. Let's hear what you've got to say before his face."

"It's mighty quare," repeated Myles, biting his knuckles.

The prospect of a duel in which you can take an outsider's interest is even more delightful to the majority of mankind than the prospect of a free fight, in which heads, your own very likely, will be broken, and much subsequent annoyance caused in the shape of wounds and bruises. The crowd pressed round, no longer to hoot and throw stones at one man, but in the hope of witnessing the fair duello. Beside Jack stood Norah, pale, cool, and determined, with her handkerchief to her bleeding lip; and in front of him, bending forward, and staring into the newcomer's face, was Myles. Behind the three was Hodder, the foreman.

"Let us all hear," said Jack, "what the man has to say."

"Now then, chap, speak up."

The "chap" showed little inclination to speak up.

"I am a stranger here," he said.

"Begorra, I thought I knew him," shouted Myles.

"Quiet, Myles, quiet; all in good time," said Jack. "I know him too." The man turned paler, if possible, and looked uneasily from side to side; but there was no way of escape.

"Speak up, man," shouted the crowd.—"I came here a stranger," he began, in an oily voice, "to inquire into the prospects and condition of the down-trodden English workmen."

"Don't call names," said Hodder. "What have you got to say about Mr. Armstrong?"

"Ay," said the first spokesman, "tell us what you said last night; what you've said a dozen nights. What did you hear young Jack Armstrong say?"

"I am coming to that," said the stranger. "Being a stranger here, a delegate from the United States to look for men willing to escape from starving to"—

"Yah—yah!" cried the boys.

"Go on with your story, man," said Hodder; "and cut it short. What about Armstrong?"

Driven into a corner, the man replied: "I heard him tell Mr. Bayliss, not once, but twice, that his new invention would send half the hands about their business." There was a dead silence, and all looked to Jack. He moved a step nearer the man.

"It is a lie!" he said. "Men, you have known me for eight years. I say it is a lie. Which will you believe?" There was a movement and a murmur. Jack went on, advancing another step nearer the man: "Now, men, I'll tell you another thing. I know this man. He is named Cardiff. The rogues on the road call him Mr. Cardiff. They also call him Captain Cardiff, the king of begging-letter writers. He is a rogue and a thief by trade. When I was a boy ten years old he tried to make me the means of getting his letters believed. By telling the truth I accidentally caused him to be arrested. He tried to murder me for this. It is twelve years ago—and in this very



place. There were no ships there then, as you know, and no docks."

"Let me go," said Mr. Cardiff, trying to force his way out. "Let me go!"

"Hold him!" shouted Hodder. "Hold him fast!" There was no need to tell them to do that. Stalwart hands were laid upon him, and Mr. Cardiff was turned again to face his enemy.

"I came down to the seaside, through the fields, with Myles Cuolahan, here. I left him to go back to the town. This man caught me. He dragged me across the meadows to a place where there was a little muddy creek."

"It's Esbrough Docks, now," cried a voice.

"I know. And he tied me to the wreck of an old barge to drown me while the tide came up. Do you know what that means? Think of it. I was ten years old. Hour after hour he lay on the beach to mock me while the water crept slowly up my body. Then, by a miracle I was saved."

"It's true," cried one of the hands, parting the crowd, and rushing into the midst. "I was in father's boat, me and Bess was in it, when we see the old wreck come floating by, and the boy tied on to it. It's all true, chaps, every word's true!"

The crowd was as silent and still as the air before the breaking of a great storm.

"He returns after ten years, to poison my name among you. Men, I say again it is a lie. Which do you believe?"

Then Myles pushed Jack aside, and, by a dexterous sweep of his hand, knocked hat, wig, and whiskers, complete, from the head of Mr. Cardiff. He stood revealed an old man with blurred and blotched features, and a stubbly crop of snow-white hair.

Myles held up his left fist, not in a threatening way, but as one who wishes to call attention to some natural beauty.

"Look at that, man," he said, pointing to a great scar running from the biggest knuckle down the back of his hand. "What did that? 'Twas your teeth. Boys, I

promised to forgive him when I'd thrashed him. And I left little Jack with Mr. Fortescue, and I had no rest nor peace night nor day till I found him, and I fought him. 'Twas a poor fight when all the hitting was on one side, but when I left off, bedad, I don't think there was a sound inch over his whole body. Ye're a bad lot, Cardiff Jack; and I thought it would be a lesson for you, ye black, murdherin', Saxon thief. And what will we do wid him, boys, now we've got him safe and sound, and us all friends again? Shall we duck him? Shall we drown him? Shall we"——

There was a hoarse roar again. "Duck him — drown him!" and with these an ominous hiss that meant further mischief.

Norah, who had taken no part in all these proceedings, stepped quickly forward, and caught the old man, who was shaking and trembling in every limb, by the hand. The crowd was quiet again, curious to see what she would do. She held him by the hand, and motioned them to silence.

"He is an old man," she said, "and helpless. It is my father and my—and Jack Armstrong that he has injured, not you. Let him be my prisoner, and please make way for us to pass out."

The men parted right and left, and the girl passed through the midst, leading her prisoner in safety. They moved slowly, because the old man's limbs were trembling, and in his ears rang the threats of the revengeful mob.

"We turn here," said the girl, "out of their sight. So now I will take you by a short cut to our house."

As they disappeared a mighty shout reached their ears. It was the fickle mob shouting for Jack, and, foremost among the voices, Norah thought she could distinguish that of her father. This was very possible, because that Irishman, besides being gifted with an enthusiastic and sympathetic nature which obliged him to take part in all demonstrations of joy and respect, had an admirable, and even a trumpet-like voice, of which he was at this moment making the fullest use, dancing, and roaring, and waving his stick, while his coat-tails hung in shreds about him. Mr. Cardiff shivered

and shook. "They're comin' after me," he said. "They are running after me. They will murder me. Oh! it is a dreadful thing to be murdered. I once murdered a boy . . . . ten years ago. He took a long time to die. . . . And ever since that I've had to go back once a year to look at the place where I did it. I went to sleep before he was dead. And sometimes I think he isn't dead at all." His reason, for the moment, was gone, through the fear that possessed him.

There was a short cut through the narrow streets, which had once been green lanes, to Myles's cottage. Norah led him, trembling and babbling, along these. Then she took him into her own sitting-room, and placed him in an arm-chair, and brought him a jug of milk. "Are you hungry? Are you thirsty?"

"I'm hungry and thirsty both. I've got no money to pay my bill at the inn. I've had nothing to eat all day, and nothing last night but whisky. Give me some more whisky."

"No, drink the milk. It is good for you."

He took a long draught of milk. Then he looked up and laughed—a queer, vacuous laugh. "Give me some cold meat," he said. "I don't know who you are, or how I came here. There's something up, but I can't remember."

She fetched him cold meat. As he ate greedily, she began to think of his wretched, miserable, sinful life, terminating in an old age so ungodly and so despicable. Then tears came into her eyes, and when her guest looked up his hostess was weeping over him. He answered her look with one that might almost be called a look of shame. The meat had strengthened him, and his reason was returned.

"Don't cry over me," he said roughly. "Keep your tears for some one worth crying over. . . . Lend me a hat, and give me a little money, and let me go."

She brought him a hat of Jack's and took out her purse. "I have not got much money," she said, looking at the contents. The man made a snatch at the little purse, and tore it from her hands. She half screamed, and then looked him boldly in the face.



"Take it all," she said. "You are welcome to it all—and more if I had it—if only you will repent and lead a better life."

He hesitated. Then he gently placed the purse back in her hands. And then he began to stammer: "I tried to ruin Jack Armstrong. I know you now. You are Myles Cuolahan's daughter. . . . I wanted to murder the boy ten years ago. . . . It is all true. . . . You saved my life from the men. . . . You brought me here. . . . You gave me meat and drink. . . . You . . . You . . ." He bent his head. "You shed tears over me. . . . And I rob you. I said I was a gentleman once. I was. . . I was a gentleman once."

The wretched man left the purse in her hands, untouched, and disappeared.

## CHAPTER X.

**B**UT Jack returned no more to the works. Next morning he called very early to see Mr. Bayliss, who was at breakfast. Ella was pouring out tea, and made a pretty picture in her light morning dress and fair curls.

"Come in, Armstrong," shouted Mr. Bayliss, in his cheeriest way, "come in. Hodder was here last night. And I'm going to make an example of every man. Hodder's got the names of some fifty. You may trust Hodder in everything that doesn't want more than common sense. Sit down and have some breakfast."

"O Mr. Armstrong!" said Ella, in her pretty, placid way, "we have heard the whole story. And you might have been killed."

"Might have been killed? Would have been killed," said her father, "but for that trump of a girl, Norah Cuolahan. Countess of Connaught, Frank Perry mont calls her. Gad! I'd make her Duchess at once, if I had my will. To think of her—Hodder met her, and told her he was afraid there would be danger. Instead of sending for the police, she made Hodder take her to the place. She ought to be a general in

petticoats. Armstrong, I drink her health in a cup of tea."

"Norah is a brave girl," said Jack, reddening.

"Will you take tea or coffee, Mr. Armstrong?" asked Ella. "Oh! how I wish I had been there! To do one brave thing in your life, you know; it makes one envious. Two lumps of sugar or one? Three? oh! Mr. Armstrong, that is very extravagant. I should like to have seen Norah as Hodder described her. Papa, I didn't know before that Hodder was so clever."

"Hodder is mad about it, Jack. He was here last night describing the whole scene; and if I did not know that Hodder is the most sober creature alive, I should have said he had been drinking. As it is, I can only say that Hodder has mistaken his vocation, and ought to have been an actor."

"And when she took the wretched man away from the mob, where did she take him to?"

"She took him to the cottage, and gave him something to eat. Then he went away and disappeared," said Jack. "But it was not to talk about Norah that I came up, Mr. Bayliss. It was to ask you a favour."

"Ask a dozen, my boy, and you shall have them all. I was in hopes that you were going to show me the invention that they made so much of."

"Not yet, Mr. Bayliss. I will come to that presently."

"Well, let us talk business. Ella, my girl, run away and blow up the servants. She always does that every morning."

"O papa!" And ran away.

"Now then, Armstrong."

"First, I want you to forgive the hands, who were goaded to madness by that miserable fellow, Cardiff."

"Never, by the Lord! Out they go!"

"You see, Mr. Bayliss, there are four hundred of them. You can't punish all. One is as guilty as the other, if there is any guilt. And the man had deceived them all with his lies."

"What did Cuolahan mean by ever letting you be mixed up with such a rascal?"

"I will tell you the story as briefly as I can." Jack told him, beginning from the time when he left the house of the Bastables. "The man is gone. It is my belief that he will never come back again. The cause removed, the effect has already disappeared, and the hands were as demonstrative with me in the popular direction as they were in the other."

"Forgive them!" said Mr Bayliss meditatively. "Forgive them? Well; it was not my intention, I assure you. But as you ask it—you are the aggrieved party—I don't well see how I can refuse you. I will have them up, and make them a speech, this very morning."

"Thank you. Now there is another thing. It is more than a year since I was out of my apprenticeship. I have worked on in your engine-room, waiting for something to turn up, and nothing has yet turned up."

"Well—no," said his employer, to whom Jack was a servant whom he got for nothing. "I have not yet seen my way—but I—shall before long, I have no doubt I shall—to offering you a regular salary and a leading position. I have not forgotten that in the old days your poor father and I were partners. It was a sorry business we had, Armstrong; a devilish poor affair, as you may guess. Only the finding of the iron set me up."

"That, and the working of the Ravendale seam, I suppose."

"Ay—ay!" returned Mr. Bayliss. "That was the best stroke of business I ever did. But go on."

"What I came especially to say is this: Mr. Fortescue, with his usual liberality, wants me to go to Germany."

"Go to Germany! What will you see in Germany that you cannot see here?"

"Not much. Our machinery is better; our men are better; and where they work one ton, we work a thousand. Still, there is something. Where is the finest steel made?"

"In Prussia, confound it!"—"Yes; but why?"

"You ought to know by this time."

"I do know. But I want to go and see. I am a chemist, as you know, among other things."



"You are a devilish clever young fellow, Jack Armstrong," said Mr. Bayliss. "And you know everything, I believe."

"I know a good deal about metals. And I am going to Germany to learn more. I am going to find out, Mr. Bayliss," said Jack, his face flushing, "if I can, the way to make as good steel here as they make in Prussia."

Bayliss looked at him for a moment with a sort of astonishment. "By Gad! you are a plucky young rascal. And ambitious, I believe."

"I told you before that I am ambitious. Mr. Bayliss, all this town, and all the land around it, once belonged to my fathers." Mr. Bayliss turned pale. "That is all gone now, and gone for good." Mr. Bayliss recovered his natural colour. "But I cannot bear to think that I shall have to go on all my life as an *employé*. I tell you because you are an old friend of my father's, and because you have been extremely kind to me, that I mean to be a master. Mr. Fortescue talks of giving me money, but I have no claims to it, and he has cousins who will think that I have defrauded them. I would rather make my own way."

"It is an honourable ambition, Jack," replied Mr. Bayliss. "A very honourable ambition. It was my own. 'Let me make my own way,' I used to say, 'and show the world what sort of a man I am.' Go on, even if you clash with my interests."

"I shall hardly do that," said Jack.

"I don't know. I am not so young as I was. I am fifty. I have no successor. Perhaps—who knows? And then you will marry Norah Cuolahan, I suppose?"

It was Jack's turn to change colour. "I am afraid not. I am sure I shall not. I have always regarded Norah as my sister."

"And as for a successor," continued Mr. Bayliss, in a ruminative manner, "I suppose you know, or, if you do not, I may tell you in confidence, that I have always looked on the marriage of my daughter and Frank Perrymont as the most natural way of carrying on my works. Frank has not your practical abilities, but he will learn, and, after all, the ball

once set rolling is kept up by the paid people whose interest it is. The work is, you know, enormous—enormous,” he added, with a succulent roll of his tongue. “But we capitalists are never content. Suppose I may be worth a few hundreds of thousands now, why should I not be worth a few millions? Jack Armstrong, you will get in the swim presently, for you are a fellow of determination—got it from your mother, I suppose.”

“Was my poor mother possessed of determination?”

“She must have been, or else she never could have——” (“married your father,” he was going to say, but he checked himself)—“never could have given birth to you, my boy. However, let us return to business. You will go to Germany, you say. Very good. I cannot stop you. When do you return?”

“I propose to be away for a twelvemonth or so. Meantime, I am anxious about Myles Cuolahan. Will you keep him on?”

“Armstrong, Cuolahan is the most honest collector I ever had, and the most regular. The rents come in, thanks to his blarney, with twice the certainty they used to. I shall keep him on, and I shall raise his salary. The rents,” he said, “are a small matter to me, of course, but it is my principle, even over a thousand or two a year, to have things as carefully managed as with the great works. Cuolahan shall stay.”

“Thank you. It would break the poor fellow’s heart, now that he has his daughter with him, to give up his new life and take to the old. That, however, would be impossible.”

“And Miss Ferens?”

“Miss Ferens acquiesces in everything. More than that, she finds she cannot live altogether apart from Norah, and talks of staying with her sometimes.”

“Indeed! Really, I am astonished. We shall be glad to call upon Miss Ferens. I am very glad indeed to learn that we are going to have Miss Ferens at Esbrough. And when do you start, Armstrong?”

"I start as soon as I can get away—as soon as you will let me go."

"I will not keep you a minute. I discharge you," said Bayliss, laughing. "I discharge you from this moment. And my dear boy, if my purse can"—

"Thank you very much," said Jack; "but I only take money from Mr. Fortescue. He always keeps me well supplied. And now, Mr. Bayliss, that I have got your promise to forgive the hands, and to keep on Myles Cuolahan in your employment, and have obtained my discharge from the works, I think there is nothing more to say, except to thank you again. Forgive me for keeping my invention a secret. It is intended to lay the foundation-stone of my fortune."

They shook hands and parted. Bayliss, when he was gone, sat thinking. The past was twelve years old and more; it was well-nigh forgotten; there was little remorse, pity, or fear left after so many years of safety and unsuspection. He held the land which he had fraudulently acquired; on it was the seam of iron, and on it stood the works out of which he had built a gigantic fortune: but he forgot how he had acquired it. It is not true, you see, that criminals are always shaking in their shoes. I believe that they go on comfortably enough so long as the prospect of being found out is remote. When the chance appears probable, they repent and are exceedingly sorry, just like the bad boy at the reproach of the cane. The law seemed far off to Mr. Bayliss, and indeed he had almost ceased to believe in its existence. But this young Armstrong. He began to think that he was getting old. Supposing Frank Perrymont and Ella were to marry, the great works could never be improved unless in more vigorous hands. This young Armstrong, this clever, fearless, confident young fellow, who marched straight on to his goal, whatever it was—why not marry him to Ella, instead? And then, as he thought of the lad's determined face and resolute step, he thought of what might happen if—but no, that was impossible. Armstrong went back to the Cottage. Norah was alone, for her father had gone about



his collecting business. She was at some light work, sitting among her flowers and singing softly to herself.

Jack sat down opposite to her, and was silent.

"You are taking a holiday, Jack?" she asked. "All wheels and whirr makes Jack a dull boy. You shall walk with me as far as High Street presently, if you like."

"I am going away, Norah."

"Going away? O Jack! Going away? And when?"

"I am only going for a few months, because—for several reasons. Partly because I cannot go back and work among the men as I have done. I have grown out of it, Norah. And there is another thing: I want to follow up an idea."

"More wheels, Jack? Oh! when will you think about something else?"

"What is better to think about, Norah? Mr. Fortescue approves entirely, and I am going to Germany."

"And leave me, Jack? Leave my father and me alone?"

Jack's heart gave a mighty heave. Among the wheels that filled his brain there was always Norah's face; amid the din of the engines, above the awful thud of the steam hammer, and louder than the shriek of the whistle, was the sweet, soft voice of Norah. Not one of those voices that pretend to be soft, and so are spoken low; but a voice that was loud and clear as a bell, and yet always soft; as soft when it rang out with a fighting song, as when it wept in an Irish ballad. Leave Norah? It was hard.—"Leave us both, Jack?"

"Yes, Norah. I have been very happy since you came. So happy, but for one thing, that I do not feel the same man."

"What is the one thing, Jack?"

"I will tell you, some day. In fact, I suppose I must. Yes, Norah, I am going to Germany; and I shall stay six months, a year, two years, as long as I have to stay until my problem is worked out. It is a great problem, Norah, and one that will bring me fortune, if I solve it."

"You do not love money, Jack?"

"Yes I do, Norah. I love money for the things it will

bring. I should like to put you into a better house, and to let your father do nothing all his life but admire you; and——”

“And what would you do with yourself, Jack?”

“I have got nothing to do with myself,” said Jack gloomily. “I am done for already.”

Then he began to trifle round the room, taking up little things and putting them down again, hovering round the girl like a moth round a lamp. She sat half watching him, waiting for him to speak, but working away still, after the way of her sex, with the air of being deeply occupied with the embroidery. Her hair, lustrous and dark; the soft splendour of her eyes; the bend of her neck; the divine shape of her head; her pretty fingers deftly working in and out among the threads; the music of her voice; the rustle of her dress; all these were so many magnets which had attracted the unhappy young man till he could bear it no longer. It was not his desire to work out a problem which drove him away; it was not his invention which kept him night after night among his wheels; it was not thought of mechanics which made him silent and gloomy; it was Norah—Norah and the other woman; the siren who had lulled him with flatteries, beguiled him with music, persuaded him that she was beautiful and good, and coaxed his troth from him. He stood over her, and he noticed that her fingers trembled as she worked; for if he dared not speak to her, she dared not look up at him. He lost his self-control; he stooped and took her hand in his; he knelt at her feet, and kissed it passionately.

“I am breaking my honour in speaking to you. I have no right to tell you that I love you, Norah.”

“No right, Jack? Why have you no right?”

“Because, Norah, you will hate me. Because I have given away my word to another woman. Because I was a poor foolish creature, who allowed himself to be cajoled and tricked. Norah, I love you, and I am engaged to another woman. Pity me.”

Norah's tears rose to her eyes. Then she gently withdrew her hand, and tried to face the question. “Jack,” she whispered, “is it Ella Bayliss?”—“No,” he answered.

She was silent again for a space. "Jack, is there no way out of it?"—"None."

"Does she know that you do not love her?"

"She knows. But she will not give me up. Do not ask me any more, Norah."

"She knows, and she will not give him up," Norah repeated. "Jack, let us have no concealments." She placed her hand on his arm. "I love you too. I know it now. I knew it the moment I felt the touch of your hand and your lips on my hand. I love you as much as you can love me, and more, my own, my hero—more a thousand times, because you have your work to think about, and I have only—you. My poor Jack, we are very unhappy. How old was I when Miss Ferens took me away?"

"I don't know, Norah. Four or five. Such a little thing. Such an affectionate little girl, with your arms round my neck always. And I was only eight or nine. We slept on the same bed—a rough, coarse bed it was, but we lay in each other's arms. I have never thought about it until now, because I have always been so hard at work. Now it all comes back to me, the old time."

"I remember a little, Jack, and all these years I have had you before my eyes. I thought of your growing up, and growing wise—my father told me all when he came every year to see me—we used to talk about nothing but you. I knew all about your pony, and your books, and how Mr. Fortescue taught you. And so, somehow, you were always present with me. When Miss Ferens and I came to understand each other, I told her all, and she was jealous of you, because she loved me so much herself. Let us tell each other everything. You will not think me . . . unmaidenly, will you, Jack, if I tell you all?"—"Norah!"—"Then my father asked me to come home to him, and I came. It was right to come; but, Jack—I could only confess it to you—the thought was in my mind that I should meet you again. And I came. You were so cold, Jack, when first I came."

"It was because I was afraid of you, Norah."



"Afraid of me? O Jack! how could you be afraid of me?"

"You were so much above me. You were so different to the young ladies I had ever seen before. You were"—

"No, Jack, not above you. Only different from you. I see, now, that we have been brought up to look at things from different points of view. That is not being above you."

"Norah, you do not know all."

"Then do not tell me all. And when my father kissed me, Jack, I turned to be kissed by my brother, and he only gave me a timid pressure of his fingers. Then I knew that we were no longer brother and sister, and the old relations disappeared. I tried to keep it up, Jack, but it would not do."

"No, Norah, it would not do. A veil has come up between us two. My dear, there is always a veil between two people who love each other, till they know the truth, and then the veil is taken off."

"Yes, Jack!" She made a little motion with both her hands, as if to shake off a veil from her face. "See, Jack, the veil has gone. Read me now! Read my very soul, if you will." She laid her arm round his neck, and her face to his, for all this time Jack was kneeling at her feet. He drew her to him and kissed her, not passionately, but sadly. "Should I have told you, darling?" he whispered. "Is it not a double breach of faith?"

"No, Jack! I thank God that you have told me. Now I shall be happier. Tell me one thing, Jack. Is *she* in Germany?"

"No, Norah."

"Then go, Jack! go! It will give us time. Let me kiss you once, just as if I were a little girl again."

She half rose from her chair and threw herself before him, her arms round his neck, her cheek against his. It was so like, and so unlike, the last embrace that Jack had received from Mrs. Merrion, that his heart felt like lead. Then she rose. Jack rose too, and they stood face to face, hand-locked.

"You see, Jack, now, that I love you. I shall always love you. If you cannot marry me, Jack, never mind. That is nothing, now that I know that we love each other. But if anything goes wrong with you, Jack — if you are ever troubled, ever anxious, ever despondent about things which are not those of your wedded life, remember that I always love you, and that you must come to me. Promise me, dear Jack."—"I promise, Norah."—"Jack, you will be vexing yourself that you have told me. Do not, dear. It is better so. It is better always to know the truth, and face it; and then we can do our duty. You will try to give up thinking of me, and then you will perhaps get to think of, and love—the other one"——

"Norah, I am always thinking of her. And the more I think, the less I love her."

"Jack, I saw the other day, quoted, two lines which seem to me the noblest that English gentleman ever wrote. Do you know them?—

'I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honour more.'

"I know," said Jack. "Norah, I am glad I told you."

"Yes," said Norah, "you have loved me. That will be always something to think about. Only, Jack, henceforth it must never be spoken of again. I have had my love-scene. I have told you all. Ask me any question you like, and I will answer it. But we must never again speak of love. For that is a secret between us that must be hidden away for ever."

"You are always right, Norah," said Jack. "If you knew how contemptible I feel in your eyes, how wretched in my own you would"——

"Nonsense, Jack! I should do nothing. You must not feel contemptible. I ask you nothing. But I shall very soon know everything. You will go to Germany. You will work. You will make yourself famous. Perhaps—who knows?—you may escape from the fetters that bind you.

And then we can talk again. But my Jack will always save his honour."

Jack said nothing, but kissed her hand humbly, and left the room. Norah heard him go into his study and lock the door, and then she crept upstairs, and threw herself upon the bed, crying and sobbing. Jack loved her—but of what use was his love when he was promised to another? Who was that other? She started from the bed, and stood thinking. As she stood, she heard Jack's feet in the little hall. He left the house. She darted to the window, just to look at him. She saw him step across the road, and stop for a moment irresolute at the door of Laburnum Cottage. Then he walked up the steps and knocked.

Norah sank back against the wall. Good Heavens! He was going to marry Mrs. Merrion. There was no doubt in her mind, not the least. She had found out the truth. All in a moment it flashed upon her. The other one—the woman he was engaged to marry—it was Mrs. Merrion. She divined the truth: she *felt* that she was right. Marry Mrs. Merrion? "Not," thought Norah, "if I can prevent it."

Then she sat down to think. She wept no more. The spirit of war was in her breast; she must fight for her lover; she must, somehow, rescue him. But how? She did not know. Should she tell her father? No. Should she tell Miss Ferens? Yes: but it would be of little use. Should she tell Mr. Fortescue? Perhaps. Mrs. Bastable—it suddenly flashed across her how Mrs. Bastable once mysteriously hinted at things going on which she should not allow to advance beyond a certain point—that was Jack's involvement.

"He *shall* not marry her!" said the girl, setting her lips together and flashing her eyes. "He is mine."

You may inflict all wrongs upon a woman, and she will forgive you—except three. You may not forsake her for another woman; you may not take away her child; and you may not take away her lover.



## CHAPTER XI.

JACK'S departure, and the knowledge that he loved her, was to Norah like the removal of the sun from her sky. Life grew grey, colourless, and clouded. It was bad in the morning to rise with the consciousness that there would be no Jack all day long, but it was worse in the long evenings, which she passed chiefly with her father. Poor Myles had improved himself, taking the hugest pains, and no longer offended in small matters. But he was afraid of his daughter. It seemed to him something inexplicable that he should be the progenitor of such a girl: he lived in a perennial condition of awe and wonder: she belonged to another world; and though he tried to be grateful for so many mercies, he was also constrained in her presence. At morning and at evening he kissed her with a sweet caress to which his memory loved to turn. But he could not make it out. She talked to him, but her talk was different to Jack's: she poured into his mind ideas that made him ashamed of his crude notions, for he was quick at catching new things, like all Irishmen: she looked after him: she loved him—that was the strangest thing of any. And now that Jack was gone Norah would sit with him while he smoked his pipe—and yet his evenings seemed lonely. For Myles Cuolahan looked on his daughter as a veritable goddess. He had become accustomed to think of her as something so very different in his solitary days and nights; and now that he had her with him always he lost the very materials of thought, for she was a reality to him. The house was silent for want of Jack's step: it was gloomy for want of Jack's laugh: it was melancholy for want of Jack to keep them talking. And then, a fresh complication to poor Myles's troubles, came Miss Ferens. She did not, as she proposed at first, give up her house at Bedesbury, but she came to Esbrough and took lodgings for a time. And she always seemed to be in the house, this woman with the earnest eyes and the deep voice, in whose presence poor Myles could never force himself to say a word.

Norah told Miss Ferens everything. "He loves me," the girl said with sparkling eyes. "Why should he love me—he so clever and I so ignorant? How happy and grateful I ought to be! I seem to care nothing that he has made it impossible for us ever to marry—for oh! it is so pleasant to feel that one is loved. I wonder why Jack loves me—I forgot to ask him. You see we only talked about it for half an hour, and then we had so much to say that it went out of my head."

"He loves you, my dear," said Miss Ferens in her harsh voice, "because you are beautiful; and men always fancy beautiful women are angels. You are a good girl, my Norah, but you are not an angel."

"Am I pretty? I never thought much about it till I came here. Ella Bayliss says I am. But love cannot have everything to do with beauty."

"No, dear. I suppose not; though I know little enough about it. No man ever paid any attention to me, as I have often told you. But of one thing I am quite sure, that no really ugly woman was ever yet loved by any man. My dear, if a man wants to marry he must get money: if a woman wants to marry she must get good looks."

"But it sounds degrading to us that we are only to be loved for what we cannot help."

"Yes, dear; there are a good many things in life that take the conceit out of us: having to get old, being neglected, having to die, whether you like it or not—all these things are degrading. But on the whole I don't think it is degrading to be loved for one's beauty first of all—if one can convert the fire of a passion into a lasting flame. Norah, dear, I am as sure as a loveless woman can be of anything that there is no greater gift to our sex than the steady love of a man. Woe to her that has it and throws it away! You have got it, my dear, even though it be only like the spring blossom, that comes and falls and leaves no fruit behind. It will be something to make you happier all your life."

"I know who it is," said Norah, reddening, "at least I guess. Oh! I *know*, because I feel it. It is Mrs. Merrion,

that woman of whom I wrote to you. I hate her, Miss Ferens. Do not tell me just now that it is unchristian, because I cannot help it. I hate her. She is twelve years older than poor Jack; she paints her withered cheeks: she dyes her hair: she wears false curls: she enamels her wrinkled forehead: she——”

“Norah!” cried Miss Ferens. “Stop, child—stop! Where have you learned all these things?”

“Ella Bayliss told me,” answered Norah, subdued. “Ella hates her too, because—oh! Miss Ferens, it seems too wicked—the dreadful woman allows Mr. Bayliss and Captain Perry-mont to visit her.”—“Well, Norah, why not? She cannot marry everybody,” you know.

“Please don’t talk about her any more, Miss Ferens. It makes me feel out of peace with the world and everybody in it.”

The odd thing was that the day after Jack went away Mrs. Merrion herself disappeared, taking with her the French maid, and leaving Mrs. Bastable in charge of the house. This good woman, being quite alone, began to make little deferential visits to Norah, ostensibly to ask after Mr. Armstrong. She came in the morning when Norah was sure to be alone and able to receive her. In consideration of her interest in Jack, Norah forgave her connection with the enemy and allowed her to talk. She wandered a good deal when she did talk.

“I remember his father and mother, Miss Cuolahan, all the same as if it was yesterday. Poor Johnny Armstrong hadn’t much left of the property that he and his father, and his grandfather too, had all been making ducks and drakes of. Partner he was of Mr. Bayliss, and they’d got a little scrap factory—quite a poor thing. It was before my Benjamin came to the town, and I’ve been married twenty years and been separated—that is, I’ve been neither wife nor maid nor widow, if you call that being separated—for twelve years and more. All Johnny had left—because his wife told me a month before the dreadful fire, and she near her time—was a field; the very field where Mr. Bayliss’s works stand. That



was all; and when he died there was nothing, and no relations. Mr. Bayliss behaved handsome, and gave poor Johnny and his wife a decent funeral, poor as he was. And then your mother—Lord! Miss Norah, it's wonderful that you should be her daughter—she took Jack and brought him up, and they went away, and I never set eyes on him again, till he came to live with me.”

“Yes, I know about it!”

“Ah! Benjamin had found me out by that time. When we first kept company he was a lawyer's clerk; come from Newcastle, he told me, for I never knew any of his friends: and when we married he got a berth in London, and we went to town to live: that was twenty years ago. But then he got into bad hands, at least”—she corrected herself—“I never speak harm of the sperruts; for he found out his own powers and mine too. Miss Norah, many's the time I've read my Bible and got no comfort from it, but only wretchedness and misery. For the leaves open always in one or two places. There's the place where it says, ‘A man or a woman that hath a familiar sperrut, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death.’ My dear, I'm sure my husband and me had a hundred sperruts, all on familiar terms. There's the story of the woman of Endor who called up Samuel. I don't know about him, and I never called him; but I've called up Peters, and Pauls, and Johns by the dozen; and they came: and much good I got out of it, or my husband either. And the wickedness of it. My dear, did you ever hear of a rich witch? No! nor ever will. I've been a witch, and so I ought to know. And it's among the works of the flesh, put with idolatry, envy, hatred, and all the other dreadful things. And so the rest of the Bible seems no good to me.”

“But how have you been a witch?”

“Don't ask me, young lady, for I can't tell you. It was Benjamin's doing. He found me out, and then I had no peace of my life. He threw me into trances whenever he pleased, and then I could see everything that went on everywhere. Pray, my dear, that you may not be a clairvoyong. And the rappings that went on; the fingers you felt in your

hair at night, and the things you saw! Sometimes I think that the power has gone out of me, for I don't feel now as I used to, long after Benjamin went away and left me. Then I knew when he was thinking of me by the terrors that fell on me; and I followed him in a trance. He went across the sea in a ship; I saw him in a great town; after that, I saw him now and then, but each time more feebly, till at last it went out of my power altogether. I don't think he's dead, my dear. But, oh! to think of him coming back, after all these years, and beginning the old carryings on."

"Is Mrs. Merrion his cousin?"

"No, Miss Cuolahan; Jenny's my own cousin."

"Jenny? I thought her name was Adelaide."

Mrs. Bastable put up her two hands in a serious way, and whispered: "Hush, Miss Cuolahan! Never you mention it to a soul, please, but her name is Jenny, plain Jane Susan, as ever was."

"And she is your cousin?"

"Not born here, but away in Shropshire. Yes! my mother's sister's daughter. She's got money and I've got none. So I live with her and do for her. She's mad because the Esbrough ladies won't call upon her; but as I tell her, and it makes her mad, 'You know, Jenny, you never was a real lady, and a nursery governess is very well to begin with, but it doesn't make a young woman a countess all at once.' She can't bear being called Jenny, you know. And I think it's because I can't help it, for the name is as pat in my head as the grace before meat, and Adelaide is too outlandish, that I've got to stay downstairs when there's company. Jenny always says I'm out, but that's rubbish. I make the dinner. But she's a dreadful temper, my dear Miss Cuolahan, and it's a terrible time I have with her, one way and the other, and only my own sister's family in the world to go to if I leave Jenny, and they too poor to help me. Well! we've all got our burdens, and when it's over we shall be thinking of what we've received, and not what we haven't had. There's gentlemen call on Jenny enough, I'm sure. Mr. Bayliss drops in of a night and stays talking; and Captain Perry-

mont, he's taken to coming of an evening too, to say nothing of Mr. Armstrong. See, Miss Norah, Mr. Armstrong's there too often—now, mind I told you so. You keep him away."

"He is in Germany, now, at any rate."

"And nope of them ever come in the same evening, which shows how clever she is. There's more, too; but never mind; only it grieves me to see poor young Mr. Armstrong dragged in with the rest. I told her so the other day. I said, 'Jenny, do what you like with the old ones. There's Mr. Bayliss, with his fat, red face, and Captain Perrymont, with his thin, white face. You can make fools of them, if you like. But you don't make a fool of Jack Armstrong, or, as sure as my name is Keziah Bastable, I'll stop it.' I told her that plump. And then she flew into one of her rages."

"You told her that!" asked Norah with flashing eyes.

"Miss Cuolahan, I'll tell you something else. I'm only a weak, silly woman, and my nerves all gone to pieces with the clairvoyonging, but I've my feelings like women that haven't been sinful witches. And once I loved Johnny Armstrong, your Jack's father. It wasn't the like of me that an Armstrong would marry, though they were down in the world. Not but what ours was a respectable family as any in Esbrough, and my father parish clerk for thirty years; but we weren't Armstrongs, you know, we were only Kislingburys. You see the Kislingburys' headstones in the old churchyard, but the Armstrongs are mostly buried in the church, as they should, among the quality. It was a Kislingbury that built the parish pump, and an Armstrong that paid for it—well! I was young and foolish, and Johnny Armstrong used to meet me at nights, and—there—it seemed nothing that he should put his arm round my waist, you know, and kiss me; and he meant nothing, and I thought he meant everything. It's the way of men. I couldn't cry, because I had no place to cry in, not even at night, when I slept with my sister. And when I married Bastable, I re'lly believe it was because I wanted to think over handsome Johnny Armstrong, married, and dead, and buried, and to cry over him when I was alone." She stopped, out of breath.



"And now I'll go," she said. "You won't say a word of what I told you, Miss Cuolahan? Promise me! It would take the bread out of my mouth if you did. Shh-sh!" she whispered, "*Jenny hates you*. But don't you mind. I've got her tight, and she knows it. She's coming back next month."

Mrs. Bastable gone, Norah breathed more freely. She began to put things together. There was, then, something wrong about this woman. She called herself by a false name: she deceived people, so far. And though the prattling Bastable woman was as shallow as a mountain brook, and as disconnected as a racked heretic, there was no doubt that she had power over her cousin and meant to use it. So Norah felt some of the weight off her mind. Should she tell Jack? Should she tell Miss Ferens? She told the latter, at all events. But Miss Ferens was new to such things as wicked or intriguing women, and could advise nothing, except that Mrs. Bastable should tell Jack on his return.

Meantime there were festivities at which Miss Ferens was welcome as one who belonged to the best Bedesbury circle as well as the guardian of the Countess of Connaught. The autumn was a time that brought many visitors to Esbrough and its neighbourhood. In Ravendale county, as they called it, was the seat of the great and wealthy Earl of Ravendale, a baronet or two, with half a dozen squires of good old family; then a clergyman, like Mr. Fortescue, who was also a gentleman by birth and a scholar: these gave society in the neighbourhood of Esbrough its hall-mark. And into those circles Paul Bayliss, Mayor, J.P., chairman of everything, had not yet penetrated. He wanted his daughter to be one of the county ladies. He wanted to see himself invited in Ravendale county. First, he tried to get in by means of Captain Perrymont, whose interests were bound up with his own in so many ways. That could not be managed on account of the Captain's reserve, Bayliss said—really because the Captain thought his quasi partner vulgar, as indeed he was. But Bayliss became less vulgar. He did not brandish his wealth in people's faces; he put on comparatively quiet

manners; he could not help keeping himself in the front, but it was more with the air of one who has been born to greatness, such as that with which we might expect of the son—say of Lord Derby. The later manner of Paul Bayliss was rather good. He learned not to affect, not to parade, not to conceal—three very valuable lessons to a *parvenu*. Then Mr. Fortescue, who liked the man for a shrewd common sense, which contrasted with his secluded and scholarly habits but yet did not jar with them, took him up, and would drive over to the Hall to the great dinners. Presently the great dinners—perhaps through Ella's influence—became smaller and quieter; though Bayliss, with a sense of fitness which was almost artistic, refused to lessen the magnificence of service. The big red-faced successful man, with the loud full voice, seemed in his place behind an immense priceless *épergne*, and in the midst of gold and silver plate. He liked it: he felt it due to his position as a millionaire. He told Miss Ferens, truly enough, that if he were a man of good birth whose money had descended to him, he should make no show. "As it is," he said, "my money is all that recommends me—so I show it. I was just as able, just as great a man before I had my money, as I am now, only, you see, people had not found it out then. It's the framing, Miss Ferens, that makes many a picture look handsome. And I'm so splendidly framed that, by George, most people take me for a picture by one of the old masters."

"Indeed!" said Miss Ferens, laughing in her deep voice. "You are something like a Rubens I have seen."

Miss Ferens and Norah stayed at the Hall for a fortnight. A baronet called, and stayed to dinner. More than that, the baronet asked them all to dine, and had a lord in his house. So that Paul Bayliss began to think that, after all, he was going to belong to the upper circles. It did not seem to give Ella as much gratification as her father. Indeed, the conduct of that young lady had not been, for some time, all that a fond father could wish. She was uncertain of temper, she had headaches, she had fits of gloom, quite unlike the usual even tenor of her shallow way. When Norah came

she improved. For Ella fancied herself in love, and chose to assume injured airs because her father still spoke of Frank Perrymont. She was in love with Jack Armstrong, though Jack had never addressed his attentions to her in any way, as Mr. Bayliss, who was acute enough to see the reason of these humours, very well knew. At the same time he was not displeased. It came more and more into his mind that Jack was the man who would carry on the works, while Frank Perrymont would let things slide. Perhaps, too, there was a secret, half-acknowledged thought of retribution due.

There were other complications. Frank Perrymont, who ought to have fallen in love, as was arranged by both parents, with Ella Bayliss, chose to think himself in love with Norah. At the croquet parties, at the little dances, at after-dinner musical evenings, it was with Norah that he tried to get up a flirtation. As a noticeable point, Frank was always in love. With Ella Bayliss as a central figure, at which he was destined some time or other to settle, he hovered like a butterfly from flower to flower. Norah attracted him more than any girl he had ever met.

"It is not her beauty," he said, "though she is as beautiful as a dark-eyed Venus of the Isles, and as straight as Diana, but it is her voice that I love. They say that a soft voice is a sweet thing in women. Nonsense! I hate your soft voices. I like a musical voice. Norah's voice is as full of poetry as a page of Tennyson. It whispers and sings all sorts of impossible delights. When I hear it, I am carried away to some earthly Paradise where it is always afternoon. I come away from her filled with strange thoughts. Ella Bayliss is a beautiful girl, but Norah Cuolahan is more than beautiful. She is a muse. She would do for Alfred de Musset's invisible form which cheers and sustains the drooping poet."

He wrote verses for her; openly, for airs which he raked out of old portfolios; secretly, poems which he kept in his desk, or sometimes showed to her. Norah accepted the homage, not with any sense of what was meant, but with the proud air of a woman who takes whatever gifts men offer her



as a natural tribute. It is the prerogative of a goddess to make no sign when the votive offering is laid upon her shrine.

"Norah," said Ella, "I see something. Frank Perrymont is in love."

"With you, dear?" said Norah calmly.

"No, not with me at all, though papa is so eager for it. He is in love with quite somebody else."

"You mean me?" asked Norah calmly. "My dear Ella, men never know what they mean, to begin with; and if they do, they always mean the wrong thing. At any rate, I am not in love with Mr. Perrymont. And I think it extremely bad taste in him to act so as to make you think him faithless in his allegiance."

Then Ella pouted, and was silent for an hour. But she said no more about Frank Perrymont. One day, the young man sought his father in his laboratory. Here, surrounded by the shades of Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, Jean de Meung, and other great alchemists, and amid a thousand glass bottles and retorts, the enthusiast pursued the silent studies which would lead him to the discovery of the elixir vitæ, or at least the philosopher's stone.

"I want to speak to you, father," said the young man, "about myself. Can you give me five minutes?"

"Yes, if you can wait ten."

He was conducting an experiment with a crucible. Like the rest of the alchemists, the Captain was always discovering something new in chemistry. To be sure, he never hit on any new discovery that was not already known to the world, but that mattered nothing. He made a note of it in the big books about which his will had made ample provision, and went on calmly. It was just as if any one were to rediscover, in their latter days, the force of gravity, the laws of attraction, or the Copernican system, and then, after making solemn note of his find, to issue rigid instructions about giving it to the world after his death. The Captain, had he found the elixir vitæ, would probably have abstained from drinking any himself, because he was a religious man; but

would have left his secret behind him, as his predecessors did, wrapped in an obscure enigma.

"Now, Frank, what is it?"

"I am in love, sir," said Frank with a ingenuous blush.

"Yes? It is a phenomenon natural at your age. Let me see. I was thirty when I fell in love with your mother, the best of women, and married her. You are five-and-twenty, I suppose. Yes, it is natural. I hope it is with the right girl, Frank."

"It is with Norah Cuolahan, the best of all good girls."

"Norah Cuolahan!" said the Captain. "The daughter of an Irish rent-collector, made a lady by education. I was in hopes you were going to say it was with Ella Bayliss."

"The daughter of an uneducated scrap factory owner, who made himself rich by good luck, and made his daughter a lady by education," retorted Frank.

"*Habet*," returned his father, laughing. "A fair parry, Frank. But Bayliss and I have many things in common. We are both made rich by good luck. Before the iron turned up, I had five hundred a year and this house, and nothing else. Now, if you marry Ella Bayliss"—

"But I love Norah Cuolahan."

"Does she love you? You see, love is a double-barrelled kind of weapon."

"'Il y a toujours un qui aime et un qui est aimé,' " said Frank.

"Don't throw your immoral French proverbs at me, sir," said his father. "Your mother and I loved each other, and the result was——"

"Well, sir?"

"Well, sir," said the Captain, rubbing his nose, "one of the results was yourself. Another was that your poor mother was a happy woman. A third, if less consideration, was that I was a happy man. Now, Frank, there is no talking, between us, of ways and means. You shall marry where you please, provided that I am certain beforehand that the young lady loves you for yourself. Any girl in Esbrough would jump at your income. I don't want a jumping Jenny

for you. Show me a girl who loves you, as your mother loved me, and you shall have her."

"May I speak to Norah?" asked Frank.

The Captain sat down and meditated. "Before I proposed," he said, "I found out that your mother loved me. I was suspicious, so I watched her with other young fellows. I was only a lieutenant then, on leave. I flirted with girls—ugly girls, you know, so as not to create any diversion in my own feelings; for the passion of love is as uncertain as the weather in the Channel, and before you know where you are, you are blown on quite another tack."

"I suppose ugly girls have their feelings, sir," said Frank. "If you pinch them, they squeal; if you tickle them, they laugh; if you prick them, they bleed; if you make love to them and mean nothing, they suffer."

"The boy's right," said the Captain. "Gad, Frank! I believe I've been a great sinner!" Then he chuckled, as all men do after fifty, at the recollection of their sins; men under fifty like to be considered gay young rovers still. Their wives humour them, and pretend to be jealous.

"Well, sir, I tried my wife: before I married her I discovered that she cared nothing about anybody else; that she was jealous if I flirted: and that she had fixed her heart on me. So I gave her myself; and we even had a poor half-dozen years of happiness. Then she died, poor thing!—poor thing!" The Captain cleared his throat, and went on:

"Now bring your Norah Cuolahan here, and I will subject her to experiments. Then I will tell you. I have watched her—a mighty pretty girl! with her black eyes—soft black eyes, too, not great staring black eyes—and her pretty head! I am not so blind as most men of my age!"

"You are an old sailor, sir," said the diplomate, his son.

"True, Frank, true; there's nobody so wise as an old salt. Her voice, too!"

"Did you ever hear her sing, sir?"

"Am I deaf?" he replied with huge contempt. "Singing?—I have actually found the tears come into my eyes when she sang an Irish ballad."



"Did you ever see her own eyes swimming with tears while she was singing?"

"I like her lips, Frank; her ripe rosy lips, like a rosebud! Gad, sir! I always think of Henri Quatre and the young lady who was going to be a nun: 'Who is your father, my pretty dear?' asked the jolly king. 'I am the daughter of God, sire,' said the girl. 'Ventre Saint Gris!' said the king, 'I'd like to be his son-in-law!' Norah Cuolahan is a saint when she sings; she's an angel when she sits silent; she's a woman. Eh, sir!"—the Captain began to walk up and down the room—"she will be a woman when she puts her arms round some lucky devil's neck, and says, 'I love you!' Frank, you dog! if you get Norah, you'll be the luckiest man alive! But no tampering with her affections. Wait till I make my experiments upon her."

"Upon my word, sir," said Frank, "I believe you are in love with her yourself!"

## CHAPTER XII.

THE Captain, left alone, sat down and began to think. Was he in love with Norah Cuolahan? At his age—at fifty-five—to fall in love with a girl of eighteen! It was so absurd that he began to laugh, but choked. And then he turned fiery red, for he thought of certain passages that had passed between himself and another lady—older, it was true, than Norah, but still—but still——He contrasted the two.

"Pshaw!" he cried, pacing the floor of his laboratory, "what can an old fool like me expect but painted cheeks and artificial ways! Of course, Adelaide paints, and she's full of airs; but she's a lady—widow of a general officer, too. And little Norah is the daughter of a collector of rents;—a man you could not ask to dinner. And yet what would it matter? The little witch!—the soft-eyed little witch! What a devil of a thing it is to get old! We ought to have three lives at least; and a beautiful woman in every one."

Then he broke off the subject in his mind, and resumed the current of his thoughts, set steadily, with few interruptions, in the direction of the elixir vitæ and the philosopher's stone. But he did not forget his promised experiments.

Mrs. Merrion came home again, and in a temper which boded storm. Something had happened. Outwardly, she was calm; but Mrs. Bastable's experience warned her that the most tranquil weather frequently precedes a hurricane of the most violent kind. Pauline privately imparted to Mrs. Bastable the fact that the glass had been fixed at "set stormy" for some days past, ever since the receipt of a letter. Keziah was not a brave woman, but she was not afraid of Mrs. Merrion; and at the worst times, when Pauline would run shuddering like a vessel with close-reefed sails before a gale, and when the housemaid would burst into tears of trembling fear, beneath the cascade of invective which dropped, instead of pearls, from this angry lady's lips, Keziah would calmly front the danger, and reduce her to silence by mere indifference of the nervous system. A woman in wrath, you see, is like a woman in love; she requires sympathy, support, and reciprocity. Now, Keziah afforded none of these aids; so that Mrs. Merrion, when Pauline was routed and the housemaid reduced to rags, ran down of her own accord. On this occasion, when she was quite spent, Mrs. Bastable asked quietly what the matter was.

"You go up to London in a temper, Jenny," she said, "and you come back in a temper; and I'm sure I don't know why."

"And I'm not going to tell you," answered her cousin. "I suppose I can be in a temper if I like. I'm my own mistress."

Then she sat down and wrote a letter. "My own Jack," it began. "I received your note, which was sent on to London to me, and was astonished at the contents. You may, if you please, refuse to keep to your written word. All the same, I have it, and shall make what use I please of it. And my first use will be to go to Mr. Fortescue with it, and show it to him. He will be able to form his own judgment

about the character for honour, truth, and constancy which you will deserve. But I am not writing to threaten you. I refuse to accept your letter. I appeal to the long evenings we have passed together, to the words you have spoken, to the kisses which I feel on my cheek always, for I never loved anybody, really, except you, and until I am your wife I shall always be your betrothed.—ADELAIDE."

Looking for an envelope in her writing-table, she came upon two or three other documents, which she read with a curious smile. "I am a great fool," she said to herself. "I am infatuated with this boy, who will get tired of me in a week and make my life miserable for me in a month. Let him take care. If he does I can make his more miserable, if I tell him all. I am indeed a fool. What is the boy after all? O Jack! if I could get your brown curls out of my heart, I might be Mrs. Perrymont, or Mrs. Bayliss—Queen of Esbrough—to-morrow, for here are their letters to say so. But I can't—I can't. I think always of the time when he threw his arms—his great strong arms—round my neck, and told me he loved me. Good honest love it was then, such love as few women get; the first and best, and the most constant, if it is properly handled. And I think he did love me once, or was it only a kind of intoxication? Men used to tell me, in the old days, that I intoxicated them with my eyes. I am getting old now, but my eyes remain the same. I must have bewitched him as I used to bewitch all the rest. I *will* marry him—I will. I will have neither the stiff-necked old Captain with his chemicals, nor the red-faced Bayliss, fifty-five if he's a day, with his pompous self-conceit. I will have my Jack, my handsome, my bonny Jack. And as for that Norah girl, I wish I could poison her.

She looked as if she could for a moment, then she laughed in her hollow way. "Norah? The girl is a lady, and I am only half a lady. Well, but then I know the world. She is nineteen, and I am turned five-and-thirty. But then I know things and she knows nothing. Bah! she is a chit. And here I have Jack's letters. And if the worst comes to the worst, I will bring an action against him. I am the widow



of General Merrion of the Confederate Service, formerly of Louisiana. Who is to say I am not? I defy them to prove a single thing, or even to bring forward a single charge. Here are his letters. 'Dearest Adelaide,' 'Dearest,' 'My own,' all written on bits of note-paper and sent across the street in answer to mine. Jack, my boy, I've got you under my thumb. You are mine, and nobody else's. Pretty Norah! Poor little child. I shall see your insolent contemptuous cheeks grow pale, my dear. I shall see the light in your eyes grow dim. I shall watch you pining away when you know that he is to be married, and married to ME. For you love him; I saw you flush when I said you were his sister. You love him; and for all your demurity, sleekness, and purity, Countess of Connaught, you shall sorrow and be miserable." Then she laughed again. And then she stopped, put up the letters, and took a hasty look at herself in the chimney-glass, for she heard the knock of a visitor. "Who is that?" she said. "Is it Paul Bayliss? I do hope not. He is too insufferable. Or is it Captain Perrymont? Or is it Myles Cuolahan? I hope it is Myles. He is the one who admires me most. But it can't be him. He only comes when his daughter is out."

It was no other than Captain Perrymont, who entered in his quiet and thoughtful way, and sat down.

"So you've come back, Mrs. Merrion."

"I have come back, Captain Perrymont."

"Ah! Yes. You're looking very well to-night—a—a—Adelaide."

The Captain had been a sailor, you see. And a pretty woman has always charms to a sailor. Besides, he was going to do what he thought was a cruel thing.

"Thank you," she said, shifting her chair a little nearer his. "Thank you. Yes. I am very well indeed. What is the matter with you this evening?" For Captain Perrymont, sooth to say, had been wont to show more ardour in his visits at the beginning of an interview, though he sometimes slacked off towards the finish.

"Well, Adelaide," he began, refreshing himself with a

kiss, "I can't help it, and couldn't if I was eighty, instead of fifty-four and three-quarters. The fact is, I've been thinking that a certain letter I sent you was a mistake."

"I've got six letters from you," she replied, "all kept, and all locked up. Which is the mistaken letter?"

The Captain changed colour. But he remembered that he had once been in command of a frigate, and encouraged himself.

"They are all mistaken. I want them back."

"Captain Perrymont asks me to marry him," said Mrs. Merriion softly, addressing the world in general. "He takes advantage of my promise to kiss me, and the next minute he says it was all a mistake."

"Kissing you!" murmured the Captain. "Now, I put it to you, my dear—did ever a man find himself in your company alone for an hour without doing the same thing?"

She laughed. Some ladies would have taken it for an insult. Mrs. Merriion received it as a compliment to her beauty. Nevertheless she disclaimed it.

"I suppose you think that I allow all the world to make love to me. You are mistaken again, Captain Perrymont. But see, you want me to give up your letters. What if I refuse?"

"Then I offer to buy them back."

"That is frank," she replied.

"I like to call things by their right names. You made a fool of me, and I am not going to marry you. You have letters by which you can make a fool of me in the public courts, if you like. A woman looks a greater fool, however. Now will you give me my letters back?"

"Captain Perrymont"—Mrs. Merriion turned upon him quickly—"you are in love with another woman. Lord, man, don't look ashamed. There is many another old fool in the world. You are in love, and it is no use trying to hide it, with Norah Cuolahan." The Captain answered nothing. "So is your son. But Norah will never love him."

"Will she not? Why not? How do you know?"

"Oh! I know many things. Norah will not marry your

son : whether she will marry your son's father is quite another question. She is poor ; you are rich : she has no position ; you are a gentleman : she is without any prospects ; you will assure her future. Upon my word, Captain Perrymont, I think you have a very good chance. Now, look here. You are wrong in supposing that I will sell your letters to you, at least, for the present. I will do nothing of the kind. To begin with, I am not altogether destitute, as you know. I have enough for a woman's simple wants"—including champagne, Chateau Lafitte, and curaçoa, which were among her simple wants. "I am not a mercenary woman. When you told me you loved me"—she drew out a pocket-handkerchief to conceal the dryness of her eyes—"when you said you loved me, I thought myself a happy woman at last. My poor dear general was a good man, but he was too old, and full of ailments. I was his nurse. I thought that the time had come when, no longer a young woman—I am already past eight-and twenty—I was to have a husband ; one to whom I could look for protection as well as love. But it is not to be. Sir, Captain Perrymont, I can be generous. On the day when you tell me that Norah Cuolahan is engaged to you, I give you back your letters. But not before. And now, sir, good night. Trifle with no other woman's happiness. Go, Captain Perrymont ! Go ! and forget your—your—p-p-poor, poor Adelaide."

She fell back on the sofa in an ecstasy of tears, her face buried in her hands. The captain, preserving his equanimity under these trying circumstances, saw on the desk his own bundle of letters. Noiselessly and rapidly he possessed himself of them, and slid them into his pocket. It was done in a moment. Then he began to soothe her.

"My poor Adelaide," he said. "I am grieved indeed that my hasty words could hurt your feelings. Had I known, before, that you were touched by the supposed affections of an old boy like me, I should have acted differently. You are a very generous woman, by Gad ; and—and—" here his voice choked, for he thought of the letters in his pocket, and he was on the point of a chuckle, but refrained in time.



"Good-bye, Adelaide. Let an old fellow have one more kiss."

She turned half a cheek to him, a very fair cheek, and the gallant Captain impressed a fervent kiss upon it. Then he disappeared, walking down the road, with an occasional tap of his pocket to ascertain the existence of the letters.

"Well out of that, old salt," he said, shaking his head; "deuced well out of that! She's a pirate, or I'm mistaken. And to think of her finding me out. There's Cuolahan's cottage, and there—hang me, if there isn't Frank in the garden!"

It was a bright moonlight night in August, about half-past ten. The Captain stood under a tree in the shade. The front of the cottage was lit up by the white moonlight. A single window, on the first floor, was lit up. In the garden sat Myles, with his pipe in his mouth, while Frank was tootling on the flute.

"It's lovely, Mr. Frank," said Myles; "lovely. When I was a boy at Ennis, where the fair was—you'll have heard of Ennis fair—there was a boy about your weight, though I think he'd have doubled you up with a shillalah, used to handle a flute as I'd handle a knife and fork. They bruk his head once over a wake they had—it was my own father's first cousin twice removed—and after that, divil a chune he'd play but 'Croppies, lie down:' and so, poor fellow, he got his head bruk so often, that once he laid down and never got up again. Kilt entirely, he was."

Frank was thinking of Norah, and began to play something else.

"The puppy's serenading her, I believe."

When the air was half finished, Norah's head came out of the window. "Know, Mr. Perryumont!" she said sweetly; "my father has to get up early in the morning; and I have to get up to give him his breakfast. So you will not keep him out any longer, I am sure."

Frank pulled his flute to pieces, shook hands with Myles, and quickly walked away.

"Ho! ho!" said his father. "Ho! ho! and about this

time Adelaide has found out about the letters. Here's a good night's work."

Adelaide had not, however, found out about the letters. She swept all together, Jack's and the rest, into a drawer, as soon as her visitor had gone, and then rung the bell for Mrs. Bastable.

"Now, Keziah," she said, in great good-humour, for the prospect of Norah's possible advance in life afforded her every gratification. "Now, Keziah, my dear, get the brandy and water, and give me my cigarettes, and let us have a talk. Tell me all about the stupid Esbrough people. Has the curate person called? He's but a poor pump, but he has the good taste to admire me. I wept over his last sermon, right under his silly nose. If that lawyer's wife calls, I had best be civil to her: lawyers are always to be cultivated. For I am going to change my life, Keziah—not too much water—and I am going into society a little more. That's right! Now mix for yourself, my good soul, and talk to me."

She really was, as she said herself, only half a lady.

"Some people would call this ungentlemanly, I am afraid," said the Captain, burning the letters one by one in the candle. "But, Lord! what does it matter? A pretty fool I should have looked in a witness-box for a breach of promise. 'Is this your writing, sir? Don't equivocate. Answer me, yes or no?' 'It certainly is, my Lord.' 'Read it, Mr. Pump-handle.' 'My dearest Adelaide, I have been thinking over you all the night, so that I hardly had more than eight hours' sleep. When shall I call you mine?' Toorul-loo! 'When shall I call you my own for ever?' Ho! ho! ho! what a rage she will be in!"

Captain Perrymont next proceeded to make his promised experiments upon Norah. He gave an afternoon party, one of those much affected in the neighbourhood, where a luncheon at four allowed the abolition of dinner and dress, and supper afterwards. It was a strange old house, that of the Perrymonts'. A tower, like one of the Peels of Northumberland, once a little fortress near the coast, had tacked on to one side of it a small Elizabethan house, with diamond lattices, tall

gables, and much wood carving. This was now the servants' quarters. On the other side was a stately house, warm, comfortable, and ugly, of Queen Anne's date, practically belonging to Frank Perrymont, because the Captain lived in the tower. In front was a lawn, and round the house stood what was called the park, but it was of small dimensions, though planted with trees and laid out to the best advantage. It was five miles from Esbrough, and the Captain's works were to be seen, when the wind blew from the west so as to drive the smoke in the opposite direction, plainly in the distance. And it gave him no pain that next to his works stood those of Mr. Bayliss, bigger than his own, and belonging to a richer man. He detached Miss Ferens from the croquet players, and led her for a walk about the grounds, talking of Norah.

She is a prize for a duke, my dear Miss Ferens," he said in his grandest manner. "There is no man who ought not to be proud in marrying Miss Cuolahan—Norah, I may call her to you."

"She has not the accident of birth," said Miss Ferens, "but she has everything else."

"Not fortune, my dear lady."

"She will have all that I have. It is not a great fortune, but it is something."

"I wish I was five-and-twenty. It is hard upon us old fellows, Miss Ferens, to see these angels of beauty, and feel that they are out of your reach."

"Captain Perrymont, you have married once, and you have had your share of youth and beauty. Be content. Besides, it is absurd that a man cannot see a pretty girl without talking nonsense about her. It would make you no happier if you could take Norah in your arms and kiss her at once."

The Captain gave her a funny look. Make him no happier to take the girl in his arms and kiss and cuddle her! Good heavens! to think of the senseless nature of elderly woman-kind.

After luncheon, at which he did the honours in the most stately style, for he was proud of being at the head of his



own table, and that a well-appointed one, he left the rest of his guests to stroll about, and attached himself to Norah. Frank, disappointed, began to turn over music with Ella Bayliss.

"Play something, Frank," said his father. "My son plays the flute with remarkable sweetness, Miss Cuolahan—very remarkable sweetness. Did you ever hear him?"

Frank, bending over the portfolio, blushed, but no one saw him.

"Oh yes!" said Norah, in her frank way. "I heard him the other night. He was spending the evening with my father, and played to us."

Ella looked up, radiant. Frank, then, was in love with Norah.

"Come, Miss Cuolahan," said the Captain, "and I will show you my den, where I work."

He led her to the tower. On the first floor, raised by a dozen steps from the ground, was his own bedroom, a camp bed standing in the corner, and rows of books round the walls. That was all the furniture, save a sword hung above the bed, and the model of a ship.

"My sword," said the Captain. "It hasn't seen much fighting, but it has seen some. I left the service before the Crimean War. Here is a model of my last ship. Ah! she was a beauty of the old school. Look at her lines. Look at her rig. Look at her stern. And to think that ironclads have come into fashion. My dear young lady, though I am a man of science, I am also a sailor, and it is enough to break a man's heart. Come upstairs."

Up a stair so steep as to be almost a ladder, the Captain conducted his guest. She found herself, at the top, in a circular room round which shelves ran laden with countless bottles. A few books lay on the table in the centre. Where should have been the fireplace was a furnace. Curious diagrams lay about on chairs, marked with figures in black and red, signs which might mean anything.

"You are looking at my horoscopes," said the Captain.

"What are horoscopes?"

"They are calculations, founded on an ancient science as old as the Chaldeans, of which I am almost the only scholar left in England. This is my own. I calculated it a few years ago. It contains a prognostication of my wife's early death and my own great good fortune."

"But your wife died, and your fortune came before the prognostication was made. Is that prophesying, Captain Perrymont?"

"What does it matter, if the nativity comes true when it is calculated?" returned the astrologer. "Well now, Miss Cuolahan, here is your own nativity. I only calculated that a few days ago. You are nineteen. You have all your life before you. Shall I read it to you?"

"If it is a lucky life," said Norah, hesitating.

"I am glad that you are not afraid. It is here. I find that you were born on the"—

"You were told all that. Pass on to the future."

"You will marry. You will be happy. I am not quite certain whom you will marry. Something seems to interfere."

"If I am to be happy," murmured the girl, "I know whom I shall marry."

Captain Perrymont took his eye-glasses off his nose and laid down the document. "Is Miss Cuolahan engaged?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Norah. "And you have no right to ask the question."

"Pardon me. I have not," he returned. "Only, I am a man a great deal older than you, my dear young lady, and I took the privilege of my years. Pray forgive me."

"I forgive you," she said, smiling.

"Is—let me ask a question or two. It is not mere idle curiosity. Is—is—" The Captain's power of making experiments seemed to be eclipsed for the moment, for he stammered painfully. "Miss Cuolahan, I have observed a certain leaning towards you on the part of a—a young man—an extremely young man, in whom I take an interest."

"I cannot answer enigmas," said Norah.

"He is a rich young man, the son of a rich man."

"Oh! then it isn't——" interrupted the girl, ungrammatically.

"In fact," said the Captain, growing desperate, "it is my own son, Frank."

"Captain Perrymont, did your son ask you to speak to me?"

"No, that is—you see—I know."

"Then, if he did not, I can answer you. It is impossible, absolutely impossible, that I could ever listen to your son. Do not mistake me. I like him very much. He is very nice, and I am sure he is good. But I could not, oh! I could not *think* of marrying him."

The Captain's face beamed with satisfaction. "I always thought that Frank was a jackanapes," he said. "He is too young, is he not?"

"Much too young," said Norah in great confusion, and hardly knowing what she said.

"What you want," pursued Captain Perrymont, "is an older, a steadier man—eh? one whose habits are fixed; a man of good position: perhaps a little elderly."

"Oh! I don't know what I want," said Norah, impatiently. "I want nothing."

"Miss Cuolahan," he began again in a solemn voice.

"I shall go downstairs, I think, and join the others," said Norah quickly.

"One moment, pray—only one moment. Miss Cuolahan—Norah, if the love of Frank's father can make you happy, take it and be his wife."

Norah looked him straight in the face. She neither laughed, nor cried, nor blushed. "I take it very kindly of you, Captain Perrymont. You have an interest in me, and you think I am unprotected and friendless. That is not so, indeed. I am not afraid for myself. As I cannot marry your son, you think I might marry you, just to assure me a home. It is good of you; but of course I can only say that I thank you—and—and"—The Captain recovered himself at once. Without the least apparent emotion, he opened his arms upon the air as if to get rid of an unpleasant subject.



"You refuse, Miss Cuolahan. Well—it is not quite what you think. I persuaded myself that I loved you. I believe I do, too, but I shall see after a while. You are so pretty and so clever, and so different from the girls one meets, that really I think there is some excuse for the folly of an old boy like me. Shake hands, my dear, and don't tell Frank, or anybody else. Well, well. That is finished. Of course I can't have two lives, any more than other people, till I've finished my work here. Then, indeed—would perennial youth and boundless wealth tempt you, child! Should you like to keep your health and beauty and to have everything that gold can procure for you? That is what I can offer you, but not yet, not yet."

"That is your dream, Captain Perrymont. Are you going to make gold out of those pots and pans?"

"My dream, indeed. And as yet I seem only on the threshold. See. Here are all the books ever written—that I could hear of—on the subject. This old French poet gives the secret in a ballad, but I am too thick to understand. Cornelius gives the secret in an enigma, but I cannot read it. Albertus tells it a dozen times over in his books to those who have been initiated. I have searched everywhere for the Rosicrucians, but it is no use. I have gone to spirit-compellers, but their utterances have helped me in no way. Love, indeed, for me? Why, my dear girl, I spend the whole day and half the night in this tower. Some day I shall die here. What an ass I am! What an ass I am, to be sure! And so you can't marry Frank, eh? Well, what must he do? Go away, to cure himself?"

"Not at all. I will cure him. And he must marry Ella Bayliss. Think how rich you will be, then; and you can lock up the laboratory door and go outside among the flowers for the rest of your life."

"Go, girl," said the Captain, in good temper. "Go—you have no mind for science. Give me a kiss, you wilful queen, and be very glad you said no to an old donkey."

## CHAPTER XIII.

MISS FERENS could hardly understand the difference that a few months had made in Norah. The girl, who was only a girl, had become a woman: all her fun and frolic had gone out of her: she was grave, staid, sober. Life was serious for her, since the day when Jack had spoken. It is so with women; love awakens love: what was before only a vague inclination, an unsatisfied unknown desire, an incomprehensible restlessness, becomes a fierce flame of passion, when the man has told what is in his heart: and not before. Girls do not fall in love: they have preferences: they think one man better than another: but not until the man they "fancy," to use the homely phrase, comes, do they permit the full current of love to flow through their veins. Love springs full born in the brain of a man, like Athênê in the brain of Zeus: love, a tiny infant at first, in the heart of a woman, stretches out vague hands here and there, catching feebly at unknown distances, till the magician, Speech, gives it knowledge, power, and ripeness. Norah was in love, because Jack had spoken. She had loved him always, she said; but what was her love when Jack was a sort of brother, compared to that which now filled all her heart, and made life a sweet, intelligible, serious whole? Then she had learned more of the world. In Esbrough the grades of a society essentially bourgeois amused and interested her. Unlike that quiet Bedesbury aisle, where a few cathedral dignitaries made all the set, the Esbrough people had their fierce jealousies and bickerings. And they looked with jealousy amounting to a divine wrath on the girl whose father was nothing, positively lower than nothing, on whom they could not afford to call, going everywhere, and into the best.

About this time, too, Myles became restless. If you put the Bedouin Arab into a town, he lies about for a few days, happy in the change; but if you keep him too long, he begins to pine for the fresh free air of the desert. Myles had been a wanderer and an Arab for a good many years. While

Jack was with him, he was content to be a dweller among houses,—was proud, too, of a newly-gained respectability; but when Jack was gone, there was nobody, not even his daughter, to whom he could pour out his soul. Norah taught him: in every action, in every gesture, in every word, he recognised in the girl the existence of a world of thought, on whose threshold he was standing, with a sort of wonder and curiosity. He learned many things from her, but he could not talk to her. Between her and himself there seemed to be some hedge, too tall for him to look over. And if he tried to open his heart, it was timidly, and with a fear that he should say something that would make her ashamed of him. This was Myles's great terror, that she should be ashamed of him. Then came Miss Ferens, in whose presence he was constrained and stiff, because she knew the dreadful past.

"Don't tell her, Miss Ferens, ma'am," he whispered in an agitated voice. "Don't tell her." She knew what he meant, and renewed her promise. And then there came upon him, like a wave, the desire to be once more upon the road, if only for a week. He grew restless: he prowled about the house after dark, instead of sitting at home, as he had been wont to do.

"I can't help it, alaunah," he said one night, when Norah came out and found him marching backwards and forwards in the road. "I can't help it; but the desire's strong upon me to go back to the old life."

"Not, and leave me, father?"

"That's it, my darlin', that's what keeps me here. I can't leave you. It's ungrateful to think of it. It's a cruel wrong I'd do you. But I can't sleep at night; and all day long I think of the green fields, and the road, and the evenings, and the story-tellin', and—oh! Norah, my angel that's sent by the blessed Lord to bring me to heaven, I'm sickening to see them all again."

"Then why not go, father? You can get a holiday for a month. Leave Miss Ferens to take care of me, and go."

He gasped at the chance, and thinking, when he went to bed, of the old life to begin again, slept soundly.



Something happened which kept him in Esbrough for a while. For one morning, while Miss Ferens and Norah were sitting at work in Norah's room, there came along the road a miserable old man. A disgraceful old man; an old man all in rags, dirt, and tatters; a mumbling old man, one who shook his head from side to side, and had protruding lips that trembled when he talked to himself; an old man with flowing white hair. After him followed a tail of boys, hooting and cheering. And at sight of that horrible old man Norah rushed out of the room, and before Miss Ferens had recovered her surprise, had him into the house, and on a chair, still feebly murmuring and muttering.

"Hush, dear," she said. "Don't say anything. Only get me some milk if there is any. It is the best thing for him."

Miss Ferens got a cup of milk, which the poor old creature swallowed eagerly, and then looked about the room.

"It's a man named Cardiff," Norah whispered. "It is he who tried to murder Jack. He is old and half mad."

"Cardiff's my name," he bawled out loud. "And I'm not ashamed of it. Captain Cardiff, General Cardiff, Gentleman Cardiff, Prince of all the road—Cardiff's my name." Then his voice dropped suddenly to a whisper.

"He's after me, Miss Norah—he's after me again: all the same as when I came here last. Oh! I remember—when you gave me food and drink . . . ah! it's years ago . . . years ago . . . years ago. He's after me again."

"He's dangerous, dear," whispered Miss Ferens. "What can we do for him? Can't you persuade him to go?"

"Not yet, dear. Wait a little."

"He's after me, Miss Norah—the boy I murdered. I can't keep away from Esbrough. And I came back to see the place, and I can't find it. You know all about it: you know everything. I tied him hard and fast, the pretty boy, to the ribs of the old barge, and the tide came up, and came up, and came up—and he never cried and never asked for mercy: and I drank up all the rum in the bottle, and went to sleep and forgot him. And when I awoke in the morning it was broad daylight, and the tide was gone out and the wreck

too—and he was drowned. I murdered him. And I want to see the place where I did it. And I can't find it—I can't find it. . . . The boys throw stones at me. They call me names. If they knew they would kill me too. Don't tell them!" he cried, in an ecstasy of terror. "Don't tell them, Miss Norah, or they'll murder me too. And I'm too young to die—because I haven't repented yet. If I could find the place where I did it, I should be able to repent. But I can't. It isn't there: they've taken it away; and somehow I can't rightly remember."

"Suppose," said Norah, "that he wasn't dead, after all?"

"Don't talk damned nonsense!" he answered in a rough voice, "because I did it, I tell you. Some time ago, I saw somebody like him—I don't know where: I think it was somewhere near you, Miss Norah. I remember your name. Oh yes! . . . . Ha! ha! ha! I remember you. You gave me cold mutton, and then I thought I would rob you of your purse—and did it. Ha! ha! Cardiff Jack must keep up his reputation."

It is a curious psychological fact that he forgot the crimes he had actually committed, and remembered only those he had intended to commit.

"There was a young fellow like little Jack Armstrong, only big and strong. I hated him. I got the men to kill him with stones. Serve him right. But I wish I hadn't murdered the poor little boy. Because I can't get away from him. He drives me always back here. And it's through him that I can't think. And it's him that's brought me to trouble. I've had nothing but trouble ever since I murdered him. That was a bad day, Gentleman Cardiff, that was a bad day."

He went on maundering, the two women looking on helplessly. Presently he stopped, and, dropping his head between his hands, fell fast asleep.

"What on earth shall we do, Norah?"

"We must send for the doctor, dear, and get a nurse."

They did so, the man slumbering tranquilly. In the afternoon the nurse and the doctor came. They undressed the

poor old creature, washed him, and put him to bed. When Myles came home, Norah told him of his guest. He at once proposed that Mr. Cardiff should be transferred to the curb-stone, to lie there till he died.

"'Tis he," he cried, "that nearly murdered Jack. Norah, have you got no love for poor Jack, that you'll harbour his murderer? 'Tis he that I thrashed. Look—here's the cut I got against his teeth. I told Mr. Fortescue that I would forgive him when I'd hammered him, and not till then. 'Tis he that drove Jack out of the works and away among the foreigners; and Lord knows when I'll see him again. Norah, I didn't think it of you—you, that should have turned upon him and driven him down the road with the boys throwin' stones, and the men duckin' him in the horse-pond; you, that should have laughed at every misfortune."

"Father!" Norah cried hoarsely, "remember what you said last night."

"What did I say, alaunah?"

"You said, dear, that God had sent me to bring you to heaven. God help us both, if that is the way I have done my duty."

"What is it at all, my daughter?"

"Father, forgive us our sins, as we forgive those that sin against us and against the ones we love," said the girl.

Myles was silent for a while. "I can't, Norah, my sunshine. I can't. I'd try to, but I can't. When I think of the night I wandered about the shore looking for Jack, crying for Jack, and found him in the boat in the morning more dead than alive—I can't, Norah. But have it your own way. Only don't ask me yet. For I am not able to do it. Let me see him."

He was lying asleep, as peacefully as a child, this robber and murderer. Sleep had smoothed out the lines of his face: his mouth was pursed in a gentle smile.

"Look at him," murmured Myles. "Only to look at him, Miss Ferens, that's the biggest rogue in all England. He's the king of rogues. There's nobody to touch him. I knew him well, once."



"Mr. Cuolahan," returned Miss Ferens, "do not recall too much."

Myles collapsed, and suffered himself to be led away. In the middle of the night Norah was awakened by a cautious step. She wrapped a dressing-gown round her and hurried out. As she suspected, Mr. Cardiff, in the only robe they had left him with, was slowly creeping down the stairs. He carried a candle. She followed him. He went first into Jack's room, which was pitch-dark. Then he came out, armed with a long chisel, the first thing he came across, and made for the kitchen. Norah followed him still, with a stiffening of her nerves. He placed the candle on the table and began to hunt about the room. Norah stepped towards him, and caught him by the arm.

"What do you want, Mr. Cardiff?"

"Drink!" he replied; "drink! Give me drink. I will have it!"

"There is water," she said, pouring him out a glass from a jug. "Drink that."

"Put some rum in it. Put some rum in it. I will have it. I know who you are. You are Miss Norah. I know well. I forget how I know. It's night, and there's no one else in the house. Give me rum, or I will kill you."

"You will not kill me," replied the girl, looking him full in the face. "And I will not give you any spirits. Go to bed, Mr. Cardiff, and be ashamed of yourself."

"I must have drink. Give me beer, give me whisky, give me rum, give me anything. I must have it. Drink makes me young: drink makes me forget: drink makes me remember: drink makes me happy. Give me drink, I say."

"You had best not raise your voice," said Norah, "or you will wake my father."

"The nurse is asleep," he went on, chuckling to himself. "I've been in hospitals, and I know a nurse when I see her. She's asleep, and here I am. Now then, I'm not afraid of you. Give me the drink, before I get desperate."

"Mr. Cardiff," she replied, "you are an old man. Think how you murdered the little boy—the poor little boy."

"I want to forget it. Where is the bottle?"

"You cannot forget it. Every day he follows you: every night you hear his voice at your bedside: you see his eyes in the darkness." He groaned, and dropped the chisel. Norah adroitly put her foot on it, and drew it under the folds of her dress.

"You have that crime upon your mind. The time will come when you will be laid upon a sick-bed, unable to move. You will have no drink there: you will be unable to escape the voice of conscience: you will be ill, weak, and dying. And that boy's murder will be heavier than any lead. And there will be no one to help you." He stood shivering in every limb. "And you want to bring another murder upon your head. Wretched man! is not one enough?"

"It is too much. Oh! for mercy's sake, help me to forget."

"I will. Kneel down with me, and say what I say."

They knelt—this poor old hardened tramp, on whose conscience every conceivable crime lay like a leaden cowl, and the fresh, innocent girl, who knew nothing of sin but what she had read. They knelt, and the old villain, whose mind was weak and wandering, seemed to remember something about the talisman of virtue and innocence, for he followed in a low voice, and word for word, while she pleaded for mercy and forgiveness. When she had finished, she rose.

"God hears all we say. You have told God that you repent, and are sorry. Take care you tell him no lies, or it will be worse for you. Go now to bed, and sleep. To-night you need have no fear. Come upstairs softly, for fear of waking the house."

She had no fear of the man who a few minutes before would have murdered her, and led the way, clothed in her long white robe, her bare feet glistening upon the stair-carpet, her long hair flowing free; and the man following her unclad and bent, feeble and unsteady, wondering and dazed. She watched him get into bed, and sat down by the side of it. He tossed and moaned. The foolish nurse in her easy-chair slept steadily and comfortably. Norah laid her

hand upon his eyes, whispering, "God has heard our prayer. Think only that you repent, and sleep in peace." He turned his face upon the pillow—was it in faith, or was it in fatigue?—and slept again. When the nurse awoke, Norah left him, and went to bed. But in the morning they found their patient in a fever, and raving. Norah told the doctor what had happened.

"My dear young lady, you might have been murdered. The man has got delirium tremens."

So Myles had to put off his holiday, and watched by the bedside of his enemy, who fought and wrestled with the devils that possessed him. After a week he suddenly got better, and began to talk. Norah, listening to his foolish prattle, heard him go backwards through his life. He began with his evil life on the road, and talked wild nonsense which she did not understand. After a time he began to talk of the army: then of Oxford—when Norah discovered that he was a gentleman by birth: and then of school life. And then he stopped: seemed to recover his senses: picked up his strength, and asked to be allowed to dress and walk about again. They dressed him and brought him downstairs. He was now the most delightful-looking old man possible to imagine. His hair was long, and of that soft, creamy white which is almost pathetic; his mouth was singularly soft and sweet; his eyes were of a limpid blue; there were no ugly lines about his face; his nose, which had been swollen with drink before his illness, was fine now, and delicate in its shape; his chin was sharp and cleanly shaped; his face was smooth-shaven. Strange to say, too, his manners were perfect, though a little deferent and hesitating. This was explained presently, when they understood that his memory, having carried him faithfully back to the period when he was fourteen years of age, stopped there, and left the after part of his life a blank. Mr. Cardiff was only a boy of fourteen. What had happened after that age he forgot; could not possibly recall—made no effort to recall—not any more than a boy at Eton could try to think of a possible past future, a *paulo-post future*, in which he was sixty. They called him Mr. Cardiff, but he



made no reply. This astonished them; but after discovering gradually what had befallen him, Miss Ferens thought of asking him his name.

"I am Arthur Vyvyan Dimsdale," he answered, with the sweetest possible blush.

"We must call him Arthur," said Norah. "Father, you see that we have a new member of our family."

There was no fear of him; the doctor told them, that such as he was now, he would probably remain till the end came; he showed no vices—he spoke gently and nicely—he drank water by choice—he was delighted to be sent on messages—he would go and buy things for them—he would dig in the garden, and manifested a fine taste for flowers; only he could not bear the sight of a book, and never wanted to read anything. When any one noticed him, he would blush and laugh, like a sensitive boy; he never lost his temper—never was discontented, never sulky. "Altogether," as Miss Ferens said, "the only boy that was ever tolerable." No one in Esbrough recognised in him the fine delegate from the United States who egged on the workmen to attack young Mr. Armstrong; nor did any of the boys remember him in the gruesome, tottering old man they had chivied through the streets as joyously as the children in Mansoul, since the deliverance of that city, are reported to chivy any unfortunate waif and stray from the camp of Diabolus.

Once Norah was reading from a paper an account of some cruel deed. The "boy" interrupted her. "Norah," he said, "don't read any more. How *can* people be so wicked? It is too dreadful to think of." Evidently a carefully and delicately reared boy.

Then Myles, this event having turned out satisfactorily, grew restless again. He was ashamed of his restlessness; tried to put it down to the score of ill-health, which was absurd, as he had never a day's illness since the well-nigh fatal attack of delirium, and made his own life a burden to himself. Miss Ferens watched him with keen eyes.

"Men are so," she said to Norah. "We are content to go on quietly, the days following one another placidly, with no

change. But men are different: they want excitement and change. I have read that men in colonies and quiet country towns go mad sometimes for want of variety in their lives."

"What am I to do?" asked Norah. "I talk to him; but it never seems to me that I talk with him. He listens, and that is all. My poor father! can we not send him somewhere all by himself?"

"We will let him do what he likes for a month," said Miss Ferens, who had a quiet talk with Myles; the result being that he slipped out of the house one fine morning in October, his faithful old stick in his hand, and a bag at his back containing his simple toilette materials, and disappeared, leaving the cottage in charge of Miss Ferens and Norah—and the boy, now the most docile, quiet, and genial of all boys. After a week he came back again, a little weather-beaten about the face, his grizzled locks a little longer, and with an expression of the most profound disappointment.

Norah asked no questions; but after dinner, over his coffee, Myles opened his heart, "Norah, my princess! you haven't asked me why I came back so soon."

"We waited for you to tell us, father."

"I've nothing to tell, Norah; that is, I've everything to tell, but I don't know how to tell it. I've been to the old places and among the old people, my friends in the days when I was a licenced hawker. They are the same, but I am different. I can't go there any more. It's all you and Jack, I suppose. The life that I have been thinking, for the last six months, so full of pleasure and delight, is gone from me. I can't enjoy it any more. What have you done to me, alannah?"

"I found the cottagers glad to see me, but their ways are coarse and rough. Fancy me, Myles Cuolahan, finding anything coarse and rough. They came to their doors to welcome me; they gave me their best, poor things, but I did not enjoy it. They wanted me to sing and tell them stories, and I was glum and uncomfortable. Then I went into the towns. Norah, my dear, Miss Ferens, you won't need to be told that I couldn't stand the towns. It was all over

again. There was another Cardiff Jack—I beg your pardon,” he turned to “the boy.”

“Why do you beg my pardon, Mr. Cuolahan?” answered the young gentleman with the grey hair. “I do not know any Cardiff Jack.”

“No, I suppose you don’t,” returned Myles, with a smile. “How should you? Well, there was our old friend, and there was another, General Duckett, and some other rogues and villains, trading on honest people. And to think that once I sat down among them all, thinking no wrong, and never troubled my head about what they did, nor how they lived, provided they were good company. There were women among them. God forgive me, Norah. But when I thought of you and Miss Ferens here, and the things I have heard from you both, I could have got up and left the house. It’s sick and sad I am to think of what the world is like. And me to be in it so long, and never to know it till now. I’ve done with roaming. Henceforth I sit at home, if the Lord will.”

He was silent for a while. Then he got up, and went into Jack’s workshop, whither presently Norah followed him. He was sitting with his pipe in his mouth on a wooden stool, in an attitude of profound reflection. Norah crept behind him, unseen, and laid her hand on his forehead.

“It’s only you, darlin’ Norah?”

“Only me, father,” she replied, pulling back his head, and kissing him between the eyes.

“I am a pretty sort of man to have a daughter like you.”

“Don’t, father; you make me unhappy if you talk like that.”

“I’ve got all that a man can ask for. I’ve got a daughter that’s the queen of all women.”

“If you say that again I will . . . I will take your pipe out of your mouth.”

“It’s gone, Norah,” he replied, setting it on the lathe. “It’s gone. I’ve got the best of all daughters, and the best of all sons, though he’s gone away among the foreigners, and I’m not content. I must needs hanker after the old



wild life. O Norah, Norah! if you knew all the shame and degradation of it all. . . . That you can never know."

"You were never shamed and degraded, father."

"Not in any way you can think of, dear. But yet . . . But yet . . . Norah, will you hear your father's confession?"

"No, dear, I would rather not."

"Yes, Norah, for I can't be happy while I think there is a secret about me you might find out. Listen, dear, and kiss me afterwards if you can. I was once a great drunkard. It was years ago. Jack knows it. He was only nine years old; but he saved your life."

"Jack saved my life?"

"He saved your life, my dear; but it was your father who wanted to take it."

"O father! I cannot believe it."

"It is true, Norah; it is the truth of the blessed Gospels. Don't think that I did not love you always. God knows I did. But I was mad with the drink; and one night I got up more mad than ever, in the middle of the night. I saw you and Jack asleep in the moonlight in each other's arms, and I took the poker to kill you both."

"Poor Jack!" said Norah.

"Then I crept across the room—I remember it all so well, though I was mad—the poker in my hand, and you two, the sweet little children, sound asleep before me. To think of it, Norah, to think of it. . . . Was my heart stone? Was my mind filled with the devil? . . . And I remember I loved you both all the time I was going to do it. And then God waked up Jack. He stood in front of me, my brave boy, his eyes fearless, just as he stood before the raging workmen two months ago. . . . And he said nothing, only he took me by the arm. . . . Why, it might have happened yesterday, so well I remember it all. . . . It was the blessed . . ."

"Not the Blessed Virgin, father."

"No, I forgot I was a Prodesdan then: but whoever it was, it was some one who made me take the pillow for you, and I murdered that entirely with the poker. . . . O Norah, Norah! . . . And the next thing I remember was a long day, which

seems a year, and then I was leaning out of the window, when Miss Ferens, God bless her, pulled me back by the coat-tails, and you, that I thought I had murdered, was laughing and crowing in my arms. My darling, my Norah. . . ." He sprang to his feet, and clasped her in his arms. . . . "When I think of it all at night, I cannot do anything, since you taught me the way, but go down upon my knees, and praise God for all His mercies."

"My poor father!" said Norah. "And Miss Ferens knows all?"

"She knows everything, and she said she wouldn't tell; and Jack knows everything, and he pretends he has forgotten. Norah, forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, father; but I am thankful to you for telling me."

"It has been on my mind ever since I went away all the last week. I have seen again the wretchedness that the drink does among the people. I had almost forgotten it, Norah. I took the pledge the day after from Father Mathew himself, and I've kept it ever since; but that is not enough. Do you think I, too, could do something for the unhappy men and women, like myself, who destroy and waste their lives with the poison that the public-houses sell them?"

"Think it over, father. Why should you not?" But think it over, and—and—father—you have told me all, and I am glad, because I honour you now ten times as much as ever I did before. But don't talk of it any more. Don't let me hear about it again. It is a past horror. It is a great sin, repented of, and forgiven."

"You think that God forgives such sins?"

"Is there any sin that God will not forgive? Father, we are Christians."

"Yes, but you have never sinned."

"O father! don't say that. You do not know the heart of a girl, or you would not say it. Leave off thinking me your queen, as you call it. Think of me only as your daughter, full of faults, and only trying to do her best, and . . . and . . . go on loving me. It is love that I want."

"And love that you have, my angel from Paradise. We all love you. I love you with all my heart, for I think of you every hour of the day; I dream of you every hour of the night; all my life is yours, Norah. When I pray to God, it is for my daughter, who is taking me to heaven with her."

"Father, father, I don't deserve it."

"When I thank God, it is for you; and Jack loves you too."

"Ah! yes," murmured the girl, her eyes filling with tears, "Jack loves me too."

## CHAPTER XIV.

MISS FERENS stayed on in Esbrough. For the first time she was in a life of reality. This was what the books talked of, the crowd of workers, the hive of bees, that seemed from a distance to hum so harmoniously, and yet were so full each of his own personal hopes, envies, jealousies, and fears. It is by the blending of all these notes—there are not a great many in the gamut of human passion—that the harmonious effect is produced. It amused the lady, come into the busy manufacturing town from her quiet cathedral city, to watch what she could of all its humours; she admired the arrogant kindliness of Paul Bayliss, the quiet assumption of his rank by Captain Perrymont; she saw how

"All conditions and all minds  
(As well of glib and slippery creatures as  
Of grave and austere quality) tender down  
Their services to——"

these two mighty princes. And then she turned her eyes homewards, and saw with amazement, as well as with interest, the little comedy that was being played before her own eyes, in which Norah took the principal part, and, in the absence of Jack, Frank Perrymont was the hero. The plot of the play was that Norah had set herself to persuade Frank to be in love with Ella Bayliss; and if this were done, another difficulty remained behind, to persuade Ella to accept Frank.



The Captain did not think proper to tell his son the result of his "experiments" with Norah, and on being questioned, gravely replied that Frank had better make his own experiments for himself, which the young man proceeded to do in the manner usual among suitors. For he called at the cottage; he made a particular friend of Myles Cuolahan; he waylaid Miss Ferens and bestowed bouquets upon that lady, to her intense amazement; he wrote verses with the most ardent breath of passion, and offered them at the shrine of the adored one. Norah, inexperienced, save by the teachings of that instinct which never fails a woman, in the arts of flirtation and modern courtship, at first paid little heed to what she thought would be a passing fancy. But it was no passing fancy, and Frank Perrymont, for the first time in his life, was serious. Ella Bayliss saw it with the mixed delight which comes of having what you want and yet not getting it your own way. Most things in this world are so, chiefly because so many unreasonable people want exactly the same thing as ourselves. You see, it was not altogether pleasant to think of an old admirer going over to another woman, even although the desertion seems to leave the coast clear for other and more desirable arrangements. Fortunately, Ella did not know, nor did any one know, the whole extent of the desertion. Only Norah knew, and she was silent about it.

"Why do you bring me these verses?" she asked one day, receiving a sheet of rhymes addressed to "Aura," which the fond swain adopted because it could so easily be changed, on occasion, into Norah. "I am the worst of critics, Mr. Perrymont, even if you are the best of poets. Do you want me to tell you the faults and the beauties of the verses? They seem to me rather weak, you know, though they are certainly pretty. Have I not seen most of the lines before, or some of them? All the new poets seem to me to make up their poems bit by bit, cento fashion, out of the old ones. Perhaps the old ones did the same out of the older ones."

"I do not want you to criticise," said Frank, rather hurt at this plain speaking. "Can you not see that I try to throw my soul into my verse?"

"Yes, I see that," said Norah pitilessly. "Do not you think it rather selfish of young verse-writers to expect sympathy from the world because they *try* to throw their soul into their rhymes?"

"I do not expect sympathy from the world. I—I—hoped that I might get it from you."

She hardened her soul. He had her sympathy, because he looked so longing and so unhappy, but she would not tell him so.

"But suppose, Mr. Perrymont, that I do not want to read your soul? I have many things to think of and to do. On the whole, I have not time to read into the souls of more than a few people. I like to know what my dear Susan is thinking of, and what my father feels about things—and—but that is nearly all."

"Is there no way," asked Frank, "to touch your heart?"

"My heart," repeated Norah with a quick flush. "It is touched by everything, I think. Do you mean that I am cold and selfish?"

"Not selfish: only cold—cold to me."

Norah hesitated a moment. Then she replied, without shame or blushing—"Not cold, Frank Perrymont, because I take a great interest in you; but—I do not know whether you are only practising a little flirtation with me"—

"No; a thousand times no!"

"I believe you are not, because I know you are a gentleman, and because, though I do not think your verses very good, they seem to me to show something of your character. Then, Frank Perrymont, I will answer you before you have questioned me. You want to make love to me. Do not."

"Why not, Norah? Let me call you Norah for once."

"You may call me Norah all your life, if it will give you any pleasure. But do not ask me to love you, because—because I cannot."

"You cannot! O Norah! you think you cannot. It is the caprice of a girl. Woman's love rises to meet love: woman's passion sleeps till her lover wakens it. Let me only love you, and trust that you will soon love me."

She shook her head. "No, Frank. It is impossible. You mistake altogether. My poor boy, you would be miserable with me. You are led astray by some blindness. It is not me you love at all. It is another girl. You have written so much verse that your Aura, whom you describe there with black eyes and all the rest of it, seems to your brain to resemble me. Leave the world of fancy and come back to the world of fact. Tell me, were you not in love with some one else before you saw me?" Frank said nothing. "I am sure of it. I saw it the first time I met you. And I know who it is. Frank Perry mont, it is—shall I tell you?"

"What does it matter?" he answered stupidly.

"It is Ella Bayliss. Long before you knew me, Ella's face was in your thoughts, Ella's eyes before your own. I am certain of it. Tell me truly, was it not so?"

"I once thought I loved her."

"Then you love her still, and what you were going to say to me was the wilful treachery of love. Frank Perry mont, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"But I do not love her still," he answered passionately. "She is not like you. Norah, I love you. I live in the divine tenderness of your voice. I see all the depths of love in your eyes—I feel"—

"You feel all the unreal rapture of a poet who sets up an ideal, my poor boy," she said, with the superiority of nineteen over four and twenty. "You wanted a peg: Ella Bayliss—the *girl you love*—must be wooed and won in proper fashion, and as girls ought to be, through the permission of her father, and then you would see, what is it?—I quote your own words—her love rising to meet your love: her sleeping passion wakened by your words. Frank Perry mont, what have I done or said that you should make me your Lesbia, your Chloe, your Dulcinea? I think, sir, you have insulted me."

"No, Norah! no."

"Then you have made a great mistake about me. You have fancied that I was a girl to step between you and your bride-presumptive. Why did you think so?"

"Good heavens! You talk as if I were in love with Ella."



"You have just told me you thought you were in love with her. Men who fancy they are in love with girls and make them fancy so, and then go off to somebody else, do not seem to me worth having. Mr. Frank Perrymont, if I were to listen to you—which is impossible, quite impossible, and always was—in a week you might be in love with Ella again. I do not like will-o'-the-wisps."

Frank was silent and confused. The girl's sharp wit caught him at all points. "I was wrong," he said at last. "Give me my verses, Norah."

"No, I shall keep your verses, because they are pretty, and I do not often get pretty verses written all for my own special criticism. But you shall have a copy, if you will, to give to Ella." He held his peace. "To give to Ella, Mr. Perrymont. You hear me?"

"Yes—no, I mean, Miss Cuolahan. Undoubtedly I hear you."

"I am glad we have dropped the Christian names, because I do not think we are going to be friends at all. I am a girl inexperienced in the world, Mr. Perrymont, as you know, and only belonging to society on a sort of sufferance, which our friends in this town would very soon put an end to, if they could, but I like a man to be honourable in his court to a woman."

"You say that I am dishonourable?"

"Do not let us quarrel," she returned with a grave smile. "You see, if I were a man, we could fight. No, fighting is gone out of fashion. Gentlemen, nowadays, I believe, swear largely, and bang out of the room. You will hardly do that with me. I am going to speak my whole mind. Now listen, my young poet, and I will tell you something about women, which you may put into verse, and it will be a great deal more poetical than unreal raptures about impossible passion. Women very seldom fall in love of their own accord with any one. We are brought up as if passion was not in existence. Fathers and mothers, governesses and guardians, aunts and goody-goody books, all go on as if girls had no hearts; as if love was a thing which does not exist. So that all we know is

from novels, and that is not much, novelists being such extremely foolish creatures, as a rule. Charles Reade can draw a woman, but he is the only man among them all who knows what a woman is like—unless it be Anthony Trollope, and his girls are only pasteboard conventionalities. Presently, you see, there comes down from the army or the university, just as you came down here, a young gentleman who begins to make love. Pray, on whom did you try your 'prentice hand, Mr. Frank Perrymont?"

Frank laughed. "Go on, Miss Cuolahan. Ella wasn't the first."

"Then you ought to be more ashamed of yourself than you are, and"—she burst out laughing—"if I were your sister, I would box your depraved ears, sir. Now be quiet till I tell you." She had the least little bit of an Irish phrase, here and there, which she had picked up from her father.

"He comes down, Monsieur Chevalier, and begins to make love. Then the girl gets uneasy. Nothing in her education has prepared her for this curious feeling. She is attracted, and she is frightened. She is afraid of making advances, and she is afraid of seeming cold. If he leaves her there, if he entices her heart out of the calm fold of passionless make-believe in which they have educated her, he dooms her to certain misery. Frank Perrymont, there is a greater unhappiness than the memory of lost joys—it is the thought of joys that might have been."

She spoke half in jest and half in earnest, but her eyes filled with tears.

"Norah," said Frank, after a pause, "you speak from knowledge. You, too"—

"Hush!" she cried. "Some day, people will change it all. They will bring boys and girls up together, as they do in America, so that they shall not be so ignorant of each other's natures, and so ashamed to look into each other's souls. They will teach the children that the rose and crown of life is love—that, like all the prizes of this world, it is greatly to be desired and to be prayed for; that it does not come for all; but that all must work and make themselves

ready for it, looking on their life as due, not to themselves, but to their lovers. Ah! Frank, help the happy time, and be true to yourself."

"Tell me, Norah"—

"No, I will tell you nothing. Yes, Frank, I will tell you something, because you are a gentleman and will ask no questions, and tell no one, and try not to guess at anything. I have said all this out of my own heart. It is because I love . . . I love . . . a man . . ." She did not blush, but the words dropped from her lips with a soft lingering, while her eyes were suffused with a softness which spoke of tears in the background. "I love a man whose name you may not ask. He loves me too, but we shall, perhaps, never marry. I think, you see, of what might be, and—and, Frank, I am not happy. Do not try to move me any more. Perhaps you were mistaken. Perhaps—let me be honest with you—I want you to marry Ella Bayliss. After all, what can you do better for yourself? If she loves you, there is beauty, and there is wealth."

The young man made a gesture of impatience. "Let us finish, Miss Cuolahan. If I cannot have you, do not advise me—I shall go my own way."

"Do not be angry, Frank."

He passed from one extreme to another, and seizing her little hand, kissed it passionately. "I will do all you like, everything you like, Norah, and for your sake. Bid me marry Ella Bayliss, if you will, and I will marry her. I would even marry that woman opposite, Mrs. Merrion, if you told me."

Norah turned pale. "No, Frank, I don't think I should like you to marry her, of all women. Now go. Forget all that we have said, and think of me only as a friend. I suppose men and women may possibly be friends—may they not?—without always wanting to be in love. It is a fault of our defective education if they cannot, because we are not taught definitively that each can only belong to one. Yes, Frank, for more reasons than one, I want you to marry the girl with whom you were once in love. I want it for her



sake, to prevent her falling into misery and disappointment. And I want it—for my own.”

Frank went away—feeling something like the young man who was ordered to sell all he had and give to the poor. For Ella Bayliss was not now his ideal, and Norah was. Only his imagination, easily excited, as easily shifted its ground. Perhaps, if women were wise, they would be shy of marrying poets and young gentlemen of poetic proclivities; for their inclinations are like the point of the weathercock. Frank went to call at the Hall. Ella was alone, daintily dressed, and disposed to *bouder* with her old admirer. But then Jack had been away for three months, and one must keep one's hand in. When he went away he had already deflected many points, and if Norah should be west, and Ella south, his position might be expressed as sou'-west by south.

“Have I said too much?” asked Norah. “Will he think that I have been rude and unmaidenly?” And made herself unhappy all the morning, thinking over possible sins. Then came a letter from Jack, all to herself, and the first she had ever received from him—

“MY DEAREST NORAH,—I hear from Myles,—from your father, I mean, only I always call him Myles, and cannot help it—who gives me all the news he can think of: I hear from Mr. Bayliss, who is anxious to know how I am getting on in my quest: I hear even from Mr. Hodder, our foreman, who stood by us on that day when you behaved like Deborah and became a prophetess. I hear from—from some one who I wish had forgotten me. But I never hear from you. Write to me sometimes, if only to let me know that you have not quite forgotten me. It would be better for you if you had, because I have thrown away my chances, and have no right even to a kind thought from you. Norah, I wish at times that I had not spoken to you as I did—and then I am glad that I did. It was wrong to tell you that I love you, with such a frightful obstacle in the way, one that I do not see my way out of; but then it was a happiness greater than I can hope to make you understand only to tell you. All the world is different to me since then—I work better, I think better, I see better. Between

you and me there rises the spectre of a promise, given in a foolish moment, and yet that must be kept. You know, dear Norah, that I have bound myself. It was Mr. Fortescue's only lesson—always to keep my word. He began it the first day I went to him, and has never ceased repeating it. 'Keep your word,' he used to say; 'it is the secret of all happiness. To keep your word means honour, duty, obedience, and everything. Keep your word.' Let what will happen, I must keep my word, till I am released. But I cannot bind you. You are free, Norah. No syllable of sorrow shall escape from my lips, or from my eyes, even when you find another man whom you can love better than myself. And you will help me to bear my burden, the only one that I have. Norah, I believe I am going to make myself rich. I have found, among the ironworks of these Prussians, the secret that I looked for. It is not an actual secret, because every one well knows the method. But I think that I alone know how to carry it out. Is it because I was born in the old furnace-room that I seem to have an instinct about iron? I think it must be. This is my secret. I can turn the commonest English iron into the best. I can make of the worst metal we put into a furnace the best that was ever forged into a Krupp. I stand over the furnace and put in the manganese, that does it. I know how much to put in, and I know when to do it. I will tell all the world how much is wanted, but no one except myself knows the right moment to put it in. How do I know it? I seem to feel it. I know the colour, the heat, the fumes, and if I fail at the exact moment of time, the metal is hopelessly ruined. How the power came to me I do not know, but it is as certain as that I can read and write. And I am coming home to make the best use of my power. For I mean to be rich.

"Do you think I am mercenary? I do not. It seems to me that to make himself rich is the duty of a man in these times. I know that wealth means self-indulgence with most people, but I try to think it will not with me. I think of all that wealth can do; how it can relieve the thriftless, and help the thrifty, and aid civilisation; and I want wealth to make experiments with. I belong to the very lowest stratum, because I was brought up among the people who suffer most, and I feel for them and with them. The memory of the early days never leaves me: I remember the days of tramp along the roads, when every other

word was a word of complaint ; I remember the men who drank and the women who lamented ; I remember the suffering and the sorrow. And then I know the lives of the hands. They might be so entirely beautiful—their lives, were it not for the vices of the men, their prodigality, their selfishness, and their drink. Norah, whatever we may be to each other henceforth, let us be friends in this : I promise you that if I make money, I will help, so far as I can, the men and women about me.

“Norah, a thought often comes over me. What if we were all of us to resolve always to give to everybody in want, and always to forgive every one who trespassed against us. Would not people cease to sin and to be idle for very shame ? I cannot think that there is any man who deliberately makes evil his good. I should like to take some poor wretch from the road—I remember the kind of man exactly ; ferocious, wild-eyed, haggard with drink and want—and, after dressing him, daintily place him in a kind of prison, where he would have to associate with people of gentle life. Do you not think that after a time he would be humanised, and would look back upon the shameful past with a sort of horror ? Or there are women—those terrible women that one sees in great cities and reads of in books, say, of the French Revolution. How would it be to take one of them, and make her clean and dress her becomingly, and seat her with ladies for six months, till perforce her language was purified and her heart cleansed ? What else is meant when Christ bade us turn the other cheek, and give the other half of the stolen garment ? And yet it is nearly two thousand years ago, and we have never even tried it. Religion has yet to reign some time in the world, and perhaps the doctrine of social pardon may come in at last.

“How is it, Norah, that I can say to you what I can say to no one else ? The thoughts that come into my head are kept all to myself, except to you. I dare not tell you some because I have no right, but those that I do tell you are what I can tell to no other living creature. If I weary you with my egotism, let me know, and I will write no more.

“And now, Norah, my—sister. Since it must be so, let us be brother and sister again, and tell each other everything. The veil that was between us is lowered ; the cloud that had grown up during the year of separation is dissipated. You know me now, as you did when you were a child : you trust me, as you did then :



I know you too, Norah, now. Write to me. Just once. I shall be home again sooner than you think, but not before you have time to write me.

JACK."

The girl read the letter. Alone in the garden, where the barren branches of the apple-trees grated against each other under the cold autumn wind; her face flushed and heated, her heart beating, her pulses bounding, her blood coursing through her veins. It was her first love-letter: a strange love-letter, but yet breathing love in every word.

"He loves me," she murmured, gazing round her with eyes that saw nothing, but limpid and clear—those black eyes, wells of light and softness to those whom they love, stony-hearted Arctic Oceans to those whom they love not. "He loves me, he loves me always." And then by a natural revulsion, her thoughts turned to where "the other woman" was sitting, also waiting the return of her betrothed.

"No," she whispered savagely. "She shall not have him. She shall not have him. I will kill her first. I would rather see my Jack dead in his grave. I would rather—oh! God forgive me. God forgive me for a selfish girl." And then she thought of Mrs. Bastable, and what she had said, and took comfort.

She spent the whole afternoon in writing a reply. It was very short, but it was all she could say. "Dear Jack," it went. "Come home as soon as you can, sooner than you can if that is possible. We all want you—Myles, and Miss Ferens, and your"—sister she was going to write, but crossed it out with a shudder. "Your affectionate Norah."

## CHAPTER XV.

IT was on a cold and rainy afternoon in December that Jack came home again. Norah was sitting at the window, her work in her lap, looking sadly out on the dreary prospect. There was no colour in anything: the flowers were dead: the grey and leaden clouds hung over the sky, weighed down by

the smoke of the factories: her own life loomed before her like some long voyage over sunless seas beaten into sullen waves by a gale that had no end: what was the use of it all—what was the meaning of it all? The girl was weighed down by the solemn problem that comes to every one of us when life is at its darkest. What was the meaning of it all? At such moments the highest aspirations seem foolish, the dreams of the past are vain, the very things we most delight in lose their joy, and the things we most fear are loaded with ten times their normal weight of horror. Then comes the sunshine of heaven, and straight the spring time is on our hearts, the rain is over and done, the frosts are broken up, and all the world sings one great and glorious pæan of praise to God. For things are what we fancy them, and what the gloomy thoughts of an unquiet spirit clothes with cloud, the brightness of hope decks with all the colours of a tropical sunrise. Have you ever driven at early morning along a valley which the night has filled with fog, and watched the sun chase away the mists? Wave upon wave they rise and seem to roll along the depths swiftly, and more swiftly, till what was impenetrable cloud bursts by magic into river edged with green and glancing wood, more beautiful than any poet's dream.

Jack returned. Norah saw him with his strong elastic tread, and her heart flew up. In a moment he was with her and she was in his arms.

"Norah," he whispered, "it is nonsense. We are not brother and sister. We are lovers. I love you: I love you."

She answered nothing. Only her cheek lay against his: his hand was on her hair smoothing it back: his lips were touching hers: his strong arm was round her. He kissed her again and again, while the red blood flew to her face and back again to her heart; while her pulses beat quicker; while she glowed from head to foot with the happiness that comes but once in a life, and only then when the heart is fresh and pure.

"I have tried to make it otherwise, my darling," said her

lover. "I have thought of—of what lies between us. But I can do nothing else but love you. Tell me, dear—tell me."

"Yes, Jack," she answered. "Yes, I love you too; as much as you can love me, and more. I think of you as much as you can think of me, and more. I long to see you and to have you with me, as much as you can for me, and more. But, Jack, Jack, it is wrong; it is impossible."

He let her go for a moment, and looked across the room with a groan. He might have seen, had he suspected, the corner of a blind displaced, and behind it an opera glass, through which his *fiancée* was curiously gazing upon the scene. But it was as well for him that he did not, and better still that he did not see the face behind the glass, white with rage and disappointment.

"It shall not be impossible, Norah," Jack ground out between his teeth. "I will put an end to it; I will release myself from bondage."

But Norah had had time to freeze again, as becomes a young lady. "No, Jack; talk of something else. I was wrong; only, perhaps I could not help it. Let us remember our happiness; we have kissed each other, have we not? And what else has life to offer? Tell me of yourself. No, Jack; I will not indeed. Sit down—so, a good two yards away. And now tell me about yourself. What have you brought from Germany?"

"I have brought my new power with me that I told you of, Norah. Yes, I shall be rich, because I know how to make other people rich. I shall sell my knowledge to the highest bidder; and when I am rich—when I have sold it"—

"Then, Jack, we will face the question of the—woman over the way." Norah was as gentle as any girl in the United Kingdom, except on one subject. Mrs. Merriion was "the woman." "And till then—till then we have to face it boldly. Let us say no more about it."

"Only this, Norah; I have begged her to release me, and she refuses."

"Perhaps," said Norah, "she will not refuse when others have to beg. No, sir; I will not explain what I mean. Tell



me more about your life in Germany. How do you like the Germans, and are the German ladies pretty?"

In the evening a note came for Jack, which, fortunately for Norah's peace of mind, she did not see. It was not extraordinary that he should have to go into the town, and she saw him go without a suspicion that he was about to cross the road and go straight to "the woman's" house. Which, however, Jack did, while Norah and her white-headed boy sat down to a game of dominoes, and Myles retreated to the workshop for his evening pipe. "I like Jack," said Mr. Cardiff, arranging his dominoes. "I like Jack very much. When I grow up I shall be an engineer. I used to think that I would be a soldier, but I've changed my mind. Double sixes. Now I'm going to beat you again, Norah dear. Six-five. You see, after all, a soldier's life has nothing noble about it, except when you fight for your country."

"Every life is noble if we choose to make it so," said his instructress, who lost no opportunity of impressing a moral upon her pupil.

"I daresay; but some lives are more noble than others. I should like a life where you are always doing good in some way or other; making other people happier, and reforming wicked people. Do you think any wicked people are ever really happy, Norah?"

"I should think not. No one can be happy unless he is trying to make himself better every day."

"That is what I say to myself night and morning," replied the boy, with a beautiful look of faith and hope upon his face. "That is what I say to myself. Oh! why cannot everybody agree to help each other, Norah? I was reading yesterday about the criminal classes. The writer said that there were I don't know how many thousands who live by preying on honest people. Think of that. Preying on honest people; it sounds so dreadful." And so on; the talk which went on every day while the gentle old man, with his mind fixed at the age of thirteen or so, poured out the long thoughts that fill the brain of a clever and imaginative boy. He had read, this boy; could quote the poetry of Felicia Hemans, weeping

over the sorrowful tale of Casabianca; would even, in the garden, play by himself at being Robinson Crusoe, building a hut. He had good manners, and knew a gentleman when he saw one. That was the reason why, secretly, he did not like Norah's papa, Myles Cuolahan, in whom he saw little points of behaviour of which he could not approve. It was also the reason why he was greatly taken with Jack—the ideal of a boy, tall, handsome, and clever, and able to make things. He was a great comfort to Norah in these times, and she had fallen so completely into the old man's delusion that he was still a boy, that she regarded him as one, and was quite content to believe boyhood consistent with white hair and a feeble step. For Mr. Cardiff was growing very feeble. At nine, or even earlier, he went to bed, after a glass of milk, which he accepted with as much joy and gratitude as if strong waters did not exist and the grape had never been invented. So Jack left the two to their devices, and went across the road. Mrs. Merrion had by this time recovered her temper.

"You see, Jenny," said Keziah, on learning from her cousin that Jack had returned and had actually been kissing Norah—"at the very window! before my own eyes!"—"you see, Jenny, the boy's nothing to you, nor never will be."

"Keziah, you're a fool!" returned Jenny, "and always were a fool. Who but a fool would have married a Benjamim Bastable?"

"I was a fool then," said Keziah. "But—but I should be a Solomon in petticoats and a false front, compared with Jack Armstrong, if he were to think of marrying you, Jenny. Why, you're double his age, pretty near. Don't use bad language, because it isn't becoming. You know you're thirty-five, if you are a day, and he's twenty-two, or it may be, twenty-four."

"He's twenty-six," said Jenny, "and I'm thirty. And you had better not drive me into a rage, Keziah: I'm a meek woman enough when you let me alone."

"I know your meekness, Jenny," returned the other.

"Mighty meek you are at all times: and I'm the only one that isn't afraid of you when you are not meek. Lord bless you, Jenny! what's the use of tantrums with me? Why shouldn't Jack kiss Norah? They're almost brother and sister: and if they were husband and wife, they'd make the prettiest couple that ever was seen. Come, don't be a fool, Jenny. Try the old ones as much as you like."

Jenny flung herself out of the room with a slam, upsetting two chairs in her transit. These Keziah picked up, and went on with her work quietly.

When Jack came at her bidding, she was dressed in her best and quietest. The room was lit with a soft moderator lamp; a bright fire burned; there was the odour of fragrant coffee; and Adelaide, in black velvet, sat in her low chair by the fireside, a volume of poetry in her hand, looking a little flushed by the heat of the fire perhaps, or else from the emotion caused by the return of her betrothed. Her face, seen by artificial light, had a sort of velvety smoothness about it; and her eyes, dark, deep, and lustrous, promised mines of love and constancy. She turned them full upon Jack—an artillery which once he could not resist.

"You are back, then?" she murmured, giving him her hand, which he could not choose but take. "You are back, and you did not come to see me till I had sent for you."

"I did not," said Jack.

"And you have no word of kindness for me?" she whispered, holding his hand in hers, and bending her face so that the light should catch her profile and glance upon her lustrous hair—a *tour de force* in coquetry which this inimitable woman had acquired after many years of practice with a hand-mirror. "No single word for your Adelaide?—your betrothed? He was silent. "Tell me, Jack," she murmured, in her softest voice. "Tell me that you did not mean that cruel letter you wrote to me. It was so hard!—so bitter to bear! I read it with all the others I have from you. You have forgotten them, perhaps; but I keep them all. A lover's letters are so sacred that I keep every one. I never had any but yours, because the General married me without giving himself time



to write love-letters." That, at least, was true. In her desk were no letters from any General Merrion.

"I have got them all," she went on, kissing his hand and holding it still. "There is one in which you say that nothing shall ever part us—not sorrow, nor sickness, nor any other woman. Ah! it makes me happy to read it! Shall I show this letter to your—*sister*, Jack?"

"I have no sister," he replied.

"I mean Norah; your sister by adoption. She is a sweet girl, and is going to marry Frank Perrymont, I believe."

"Come, Adelaide," said Jack, snatching his hand from the soft and padded fetters of her fingers; "come, Adelaide, let us have an explanation."

"No; I will have no explanation."

"Can you not see that it is impossible?"

"No, I cannot; and I will not. You are, I admit, a little younger than myself. You are twenty-three, and I am nearly twenty-seven. I wish the difference was the other way; but we cannot help that. There is no impossibility, Jack, my dearest, when two people love each other."

"But when they do not?"

"That I am not concerned with. You love me: you have given me a thousand proofs—in letters. And I love you: I have given you as many proofs of that—in letters."

Jack groaned. Then he sat down, his head in his hands, and looked at her. "You refuse to release me, do you?"

"I refuse to release you, Mr. Armstrong," she replied, in a hard voice, different to the soft tones in which she had been speaking. "I utterly refuse to release you."

"Then," said Jack, rising, "I shall take the course that seems best to me."

"And I," she replied, rising too, and facing him, "shall take the course that seems best to me. We have been engaged for five years. You have written to me during all that time, letters of the most ardent affection. I have wasted my time upon you, refused to receive others whose attentions were honourable, and compromised, perhaps, the reputation of a life."

Jack looked up and smiled. She saw him smile, and would have changed colour, but for the fixity of the protecting paint.

"That is all nothing," she went on, "provided you keep your engagement as an honourable man should. Go now, Jack Armstrong, go home and think it over. Will you be a liar and a cheat, or will you be a man of honour? Will you keep the promises of five years, or will you give way to a passing passion for—for that—that"—here her temper grew the better of her—"that black-haired daughter of an Irish pedlar?"

"We will not," said Jack, "introduce any names into our discussion. I will go. And, Adelaide, it is the last time that I enter this house. My mind is made up. I have appealed to you in vain. I cannot love you. I cannot marry you. It is impossible for me to keep my word. And you must do what you think best."

"I have read," replied his Adelaide, "of women who worked spells to bring their lovers back. I have need of none. See, Jack, you will come back to me of your own accord. Look," and she threw herself at his feet, "here are the hands you have kissed so often, and the white arms you have praised. Do you forget that you have knelt at my feet and kissed them? Are my eyes grown dull? Is my cheek wrinkled? Are my lips thin and shrivelled? Is my figure shrunk and wasted? Is my hair false or grey? Have my teeth dropped out? Where is it, Jack, the love that once made you clasp me in your arms a thousand times, and kiss me till the love flew into my heart? Where is it, oh, my Jack, my handsome boy, the only man of all that ever I loved and longed to win? You will kiss me again, Jack, will you not? You will throw your arms round me, my darling?"

Her passion was not simulated. Unreal in everything else, her life a living lie, her history a tissue of deceits, the woman had found, when she should have been a staid matron, a master-passion that held her enthralled and bound her with a rod of iron. She sprang from her knees and threw herself upon Jack's breast, clutching him round the neck with her

two white arms. He stood unmoved. The woman's influence was wholly gone. Time was that at the touch of her hand he would thrill: at the rustle of her dress his pulses would move more quickly; but now it was all changed, and he saw her what she was, the woman past her prime, a made-up imitation of a lady, coarse and common, vulgar and unrestrained. She took his hand and laid it against her cheek. He disengaged her gently but firmly, and pointed to his fingers, where she had laid them on her cheek.

"See," he said, "your cheek is painted. You wash off your pretended love just as you wash off your rouge. Let me go."

"Is it peace or war?"

"I am the stronger," said Jack, "because you can do me no real harm. Let it be peace, if you let me go. It shall be war if you refuse. You may think what you have to gain, and what you have to lose. I will even, if you like, tell the world that you have refused me"—

She made a gesture of impatience. "The world—the world—what have I ever cared for the world? I want your love. Give me that and I will give you back your letters," she whispered in his ear. But he drew back and answered nothing. "Then war—war—war!" she cried. "And all the town shall ring with the passion of Jack Armstrong's letters. Two hundred of them, Jack; two hundred! And before the Court they shall all be read, every one!"

Jack said nothing, but was gone while yet she stood, with the words hissing from her mouth, a queen of passion, sublime in her unbounded wrath. Then she heard the door shut as he left the house, and sitting down before the fire, revolved plans of vengeance.

## CHAPTER XVI.

JACK went home, with a mind strangely disquieted. It was all true, and exactly as Mrs. Merrion said. He had written letters, by the score, all of them love letters, and mostly letters of passionate love. Jack was one who, living



in the present, worked hard and enjoyed hard. It had been sweet for him just to be in the presence of the Siren: there had been a time when his brain reeled at the touch of her hand. Now—now—what had caused the change? It was not that he loved her less, but that he absolutely loathed her: she, though she could not yet realise the fact, had lost her power over him; there was not even a feeling of pity left. He was disgusted that he had been the prey of a woman so common and so unreal: he was ashamed that he had poured out his thoughts and feelings so freely and frankly. As he paced up and down the little room, he thought of the fair girl lying near him, with but a wall between them, and he groaned when he thought of the things he had said to Mrs. Merrion which should have been kept for Norah. Had he but known! Did we know the possible consequences of any single act, we should never act at all. It is the blessed prerogative of human nature not to know the future. And since there seems no act that we can commit which does not do mischief to some one, there is every reason to believe that the world would fall into a lethargy, and so our race gradually become extinguished, could we calculate the consequences. Those that Jack had to face were a bundle of letters, with all that an angry woman could do. Jack was liable to be paraded in a court of law, his letters of passion read aloud, and his devotion laughed at. Most men would prefer a quiet five minutes or so under the nine-tailed cat, so that no one knew about it, to such ridicule. Jack certainly would have taken punishment with far more alacrity than the ridicule. He passed a bad night pondering over what he could do, and finally fell asleep after, for the hundredth time, assuring himself that nothing, not even public exposure, should make him keep his promise.

Norah met him at breakfast in the morning, her eyes ringed with black, her cheeks pale. She, too, had been lying awake, thinking, scheming, and regretting, listening to the tramp of Jack up and down his room, and knowing that there was another creature in the world as anxious as

herself. That was, somehow, a comfort, because they were both anxious about the same thing. If one has a toothache, one bears it better if somebody else in the house has one too. They compare the pangs, and together curse their fate.

They greeted each other with downcast eyes, as if they had sinned and were ashamed. Fancy Adam and Eve waking up in the morning after that fatal business of theirs—perhaps a little unwell in consequence of the change in diet, and certainly apprehensive of other consequences. Norah and Jack had plucked together the apple of love, and it was from a forbidden tree, because Jack had already gathered the fruit with another. Whatever Adam's shortcomings, in this, at least, he was better than Jack, that he had but one to share his guilt. Lilith came afterwards, if you remember.

Mr. Cardiff—or rather Arthur Vyvyan Dimsdale—was up before them, and, with mind intent on the importance of the task, was fashioning a model yacht which he proposed to sail in ponds some time during the spring.

"You shall show me how to sail her, Jack," he said with the confidence of a boy in a senior's powers. "I think she shall be cutter-rigged. The last one I had I sailed at the back of the Grange in . . . no"—He stopped and looked round. The only sign of his mental decay was that he sometimes confused places, and was pulled up short by finding himself not in the house where he was born, but quite a different place.

"Never mind the yacht now, Arthur," said Norah. "Let us have breakfast. Have you seen my father?"

"Myles had his breakfast an hour ago," said the boy, placing his toy on a chair, "and I'm jolly hungry."

In spite of his amazing twist, the old man did not venture to do a very great stroke of breakfast, but presently rose with a robust air and determined face, as one who was bent on enjoying the whole freedom of his holiday in running and jumping. Jack noticed how his legs trembled as he ran from the room.

"Don't take any notice, Jack," said Norah. "It is better so. He is getting feebler every day."

Presently he came back, and sat down wearily. "Norah," he said, after a pause, "I wonder if I am going to die. I remember reading a story about a boy who died at thirteen. He used to get tired, and then sit down and fall asleep. And after a little he was too weak to get out of bed. And then he died."

"You would not be afraid to die, Arthur, would you?"

He thought for a moment. "No, Norah; not afraid; not that; only I would rather live."

She spent the morning in conversation over things high and solemn, while his eyes glowed with the light of faith and hope.

"If I live, Norah dear," he said at last, taking her hand—"if I live, I will be a great preacher, and bring the world from wickedness. If I die" . . . he paused.

"If you die, Arthur."

"If I die, I shall go to heaven, shall I not, Norah?—and then we shall all meet, you and I, and—and cousin Lucy—and—where is my cousin Lucy?" He looked round with a dazed air, and then closing his eyes, lay back gently on the sofa and fell fast asleep. As he lay there, with a face out of which every crow's-foot had been smoothed, the long white hair falling back from his forehead, the lips half parted in a smile, there was a boyish look about him which was most curious. Norah sat watching him. She had grown fond of this poor waif and stray of fallen humanity. He had been stricken at her very feet: reduced to a condition in which he could do no harm, driven, perforce, back to a state of innocence, passed through the waters of Lethe, and made ignorant once more of evil. If for every sin into which manhood falls there is some animal which may be taken as its type and personification, then had Cardiff Jack been pig, wolf, tiger, and crocodile, each and all in turn, and now he was once more the bleating lamb.

Jack left them and went to see his old employer at the works. The men nodded to him in their independent and half-respectful way. Mr. Hodder came from his den and timidly shook hands with him; the furnaces, his old friends,



seemed to fan themselves into a fierce heat, and the engines to puff and snort a welcome. The young man forgot his gloomy thoughts, and pulled himself together. "Bah!" he said. "Let her do what she likes. Let her publish all the letters. I will laugh with the rest. Here is work, which is better than love."

All night he had been awake, thinking of Norah and the other: now, he shook off the troubles of his loves as he would have taken off his coat. Norah, at home, was sitting in sadness, wretched because Jack was wretched; picturing him lonely in his grief and distracted from his usual work. Mrs. Merrion, selecting and reading his letters, was rejoicing over the misery she was going to bring upon him. And here he was, with light heart and unclouded brow, stepping into the works of Bayliss's iron foundry, with his brain running undisturbed and in the usual channels. Mr. Bayliss was in his office. He looked up from the work he was engaged in, and gave Jack a friendly nod.

"Glad to see you back, Armstrong. Wait a moment . . . Now, then, my lad, for an account of yourself."

"I've been to Germany, and I've come back."

"With empty hands?"

"No, with full hands. I can do it, Mr. Bayliss."

Mr. Bayliss instinctively rose and shut the door.

"Now," he said, "let us have it out. I remember! I remember. You were going to make English steel as good as Prussian. . . . I remember."

"Yes; and I can do it."

"Supposing you can do it—taking you at your own valuation, what do you think your knowledge is worth?"

"You shall see what I can do, first. It is no secret, and if any one else can do it, let them. I experimented in Germany on English iron, and no one except myself could do it."

"Is it no secret? Is it only the old dodge of putting in the manganese? Then, Armstrong, I think very little of your secret. Everybody knows it."

"Do they know how much manganese to put in? Do they know the right time? Can they make it a certainty?"

"No."

"I can, Mr. Bayliss," Jack said with a quiet air of assurance.

"I am going to make you an offer, subject to my doing what I pretend to do."—"Go on."

"My power, if it exists, will give the foundry, when it is exercised, a strength that no other works can hope for . . . will it not?"

"Ay."

"If you had the use of it, you could increase your power and name, and therefore your influence and position, to say nothing of your income, which is perhaps great enough already."

"No man's income is great enough. I made a hundred thousand last year, but I am not satisfied even with that."

"I should help you to make more. These are my terms. You will give me a despotic control over the furnaces, always provided that I fulfil my promise to turn you out steel as good as any that can be made in Germany, and from Spanish as well as English iron—so long you will give me such a share in the business as shall guarantee me an income at least"—He named boldly a very large sum.

Mr. Bayliss looked at him with admiration. "And if I refuse?"

"Then I go to Captain Perrymont. If he refuses, I go to London, and start a company which will build a foundry here."

"You young viper!" Mr. Bayliss replied. "Would you bite the hand that nursed you?"

Jack laughed. "I have been brought up in your works, Mr. Bayliss. It is a hard school. I mean to be rich. I am grateful to you for a good many things, but chiefly for the lesson that a man who likes to push himself on can get on. I am one who pushes. My father, from all I understand, was one who was pushed."

"Ay," said Bayliss, "you are right there. Johnny was a good deal pushed. . . . When do you want to make your experiments?"

"When you please. . . . Now . . . if you please."

Not that day only, but several days afterwards, Jack experimented in the foundry. He was within the truth when he boasted of the possession of an invaluable power. He had watched the molten metal so long that he knew every mood, so to speak, of the iron, and could read it as no one else could. Everybody knew that to improve the English steel the addition of manganese was necessary. What nobody knew except Jack was the quantity, varying with the quality of the metal, that had to be put in, and the time to put it in. And he knew it. Therefore he was invaluable. For if you put in too much, or too little, or at the wrong time, you spoil the whole. Bayliss and his foreman Hodder watched and inspected. There was no secret, as Jack told them, only he was the only man in the world who could do it.

"What do you think, Hodder?"

"Well, sir, if I might be so bold, I should say—take him at his own price, and it will be a cheap bargain."

## CHAPTER XVII.

"COME over and see me. I cannot believe that you are as cruel and as false as you profess to be. Come and tell me so once more, before I act. Or come and tell me that it is all a horrid dream, and that you are still my own Jack, as I am still your own loving and most miserable, ADELAIDE."

This was the letter which was handed to Jack by Keziah, who accosted him on his way home.

"Here's a letter for you, Mr. Armstrong," she said.

He took it, and read it under a gas-lamp. Then he tore the missive into small pieces and gave them back to her.

"That is my answer—the only answer I have to give her except this. Tell her that she may act as she thinks proper. I have nothing else to say. Good-night to you, Mrs. Bastable."

The woman received the fragments, and solemnly deposited them in a capacious side pocket.



"Don't say good-night, Jack Armstrong," she whispered, looking furtively across the road. "Stay and have a word or two with me."

"I have nothing to say to you."

"No; but I have a good deal to say to you, Jack Armstrong. It isn't that I knew you when you were a little boy, and had you in the house, and kissed you a dozen times a day, pretty little boy that you were. That's nothing, because I didn't even know your name, nor who was your father. Lord! if I had known."

"Well, Mrs. Bastable, and if you had known."

"I always loved you, even then. And if you'll believe me, a middle-aged, respectable, deserted wife, I love you still. And I'd help you if I could."

"But I am afraid you cannot."

"I could, and I would. I told Miss Norah that I would, only I want you to tell me what *she's* done." This, with a jerk of the head in the direction of Laburnum Villa, to signify that it was Mrs. Merrion she meant.

"You live with her," said Jack. "You learn her secrets, I suppose. Why do you want to ask me anything?"

"She's not a good lot, my cousin Jenny," said Mrs. Bastable. "And she keeps her secrets mostly to herself."

"Your cousin—Jenny? Who is your cousin Jenny?"

"There . . . there . . . my poor tongue . . . I mean Mrs. Merrion, of course—Adelaide."

"Oh!"

"That is, she calls herself Adelaide. Jack Armstrong, don't tell her I told you; but her name's Jenny, as Miss Norah knows already. Jenny she was christened, and Jenny she'll die, whatever she calls herself. Now, then, tell me all about it."

Jack looked at her. "If you know what you profess to know, you ought to be able to tell me something. I've got nothing to tell you, except that I was a young fool, and she made me think I was in love with her."

"She always does. She makes all the men in love with her. She's made more fools than any woman of her age in the world. Bless you, is that all?"

"But she's got letters of mine."

"She's got letters from dozens. Lord! you're only one fool among many—the biggest fool, perhaps, because you've fallen in love with a woman old enough to be your mother, when there's lots of young girls in Esbrough as would jump at you. For shame, Jack Armstrong! When your father fell in love, it was with a handsome young wench like me—as I was then—or else with a sweet pretty lady like your poor mother."

"A fool I was, no doubt," said Jack. "And now I know it."

"Don't be afraid, Jack Armstrong. Don't mind what she says. She barks, but she don't dare bite. There's them behind as holds her back. As for letters, she's got letters from Mr. Bayliss, and from Captain Perrymont, and . . . and . . . all the old fools in the place. What's she to do with your letters?"

This was comfort to Jack. "Can you get her to give them back?" he asked.

"No, I can't. She locks them all up in her davenport, and there they are. She won't give them back for all my asking. Jack, have nothing more to say to her, and don't be afraid of her. She shan't harm you, whatever mischief she does."

"Mr. Bayliss! Captain Perrymont! Do you mean that they write to her?"

"Captain Perrymont hasn't written for a month and more. I think he's broke off. Mr. Bayliss always comes himself, regular, once a week."

"Good heavens! She told me she had never seen him even, and did not know him by sight."

"Jenny and lies means much the same thing," said Mrs. Bastable, "though she is my cousin."

"And who was General Merrion?"

Mrs. Bastable looked round again. Then she whispered in his ear hoarsely, "There never was no General Merrion."

"No General Merrion?"

"She never had a husband at all. She's a single woman."

"Then," said Jack coolly, "she's a considerably more artful woman than I took her for. Suppose, Mrs. Bastable,

suppose she was to bring an action against me, would you be prepared to prove this in the witness-box?"

"I'd prove that, and plenty more, if she tries to harm you. And I've told her so, only she won't believe it. Ah! she's a wilful woman, a wicked woman."

"Then why do you live with her?"

"Because I can't help it. Because I'm tied to her. Because I'm the only person in the world that cares for her and isn't afraid of her. And because I mind the old days when Jenny was a pretty young slip of a thing, good and innocent, and thought of nothing but a bit of ribbon or some coloured rag to set off her beauty. Ah! you gentlemen, you think we women haven't got any hearts. What does it matter to me that Jenny hasn't turned out so quiet and good as the rest of the family? Blood's thicker than water; and I mean to look after her, if all the world gives her up."

"I believe you're a kind-hearted woman," said Jack. "And now I'll tell you something about it. I was only eighteen, and she turned my brain. One night, after I'd been telling her that I loved her and all the rest of the nonsense, she got me to write her a promise of marriage. She wrote it, and I signed it. I would have signed anything, then. Then Norah came, and I saw what a fool I had been. All day long, you see, I was at work, and thinking of my work; and in the evening she made a fool of me."

"Same as she does to all of them. Lord! what creatures men are, to be sure. Made a fool of you, indeed! Why, couldn't you fall in love with Miss Bayliss, now, if you wanted a pretty girl?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I'm glad you didn't. You've got a sweet girl and a lovely girl, now: and if you are not kind to her, Jack Armstrong, I'll never forgive you, as sure as my name's Keziah Bastable."

"Of course, I shall be kind to Norah," he replied.

"Ah! there's different sorts of kindnesses. I've known men that were kind to their wives who'd beat them with sticks if they got into a rage."



"My good soul, be rational."

"And their wives loved them all the same, poor bleeding lambs! I've known men who were kind to their wives, but never asked themselves if the poor things were happy, nor what they wanted, and saw them pine away for want of a little thought. And I've known men who were kind to their wives, or said they were, when they'd given them a comfortable house, and left them alone by themselves the long day, and sometimes the long night. Don't you do that, Jack Armstrong. You're masterful and she's loving; you're strong and she's trustful. You've won away her heart, poor thing, and she believes you're an angel from heaven. Think of her after you've married her, Jack Armstrong. Think of the wife that wants to tell you everything, and to put all her thoughts into your heart, and don't be wrapped up for ever in your wheels and your engines. It wasn't for nothing that you were born in a foundry, when the furnace was roaring and the engine blowing and the chimneys smoking. I was there, and the first thing as ever you did was to stretch out your tiny fist to the fire and clutch at it. And the doctor says: 'Let's have a look at this son of Vulcan!' I said then, for I was a prophet before I was a witch and had familiar sperruts, I said: 'It's a great man he's going to be, give him the chance.' A beautiful baby you were, much too beautiful to live. But don't be carried away with your cleverness, Jack. Don't neglect your wife to make a little money. Have faith, and give her your evenings at least, and let her thoughts be your thoughts. I am but a foolish woman, and a sinful witch and a clairvoyong, but I can't bear to think of your father's son doing anything but what's right."

She seized his hand and held it for a moment. The tears were running down her homely cheeks, but his big bright eyes looked at her full, with an intentness which brought back the days when he was a boy, and she stood transformed, waiting for the silent summons to the mesmeric room. Then she left him; but returned again in a moment.

"I've got something more on my mind. Let me talk to you to-morrow. Now I must get back to Jenny. It's the time when she wants her brandy and water."

Jack went home. In Norah's room were only herself and Myles, for the "boy" had been sent to bed. Myles was silent and subdued, as he had been for some months, since, in fact, his disappointing tour in the provinces. Jack sat down between them, fronting the fire. Norah was on the right, a book in her hands, but not reading, and Myles on the left nursing his knee and gazing into the coals. And so all three were silent. Norah lifting a corner of her eyes to Jack when he was sitting near her, his foot actually touching her dress, a mode of personal contact which, distant as it was, refreshed her soul.

"Myles," said Jack, after a long pause, "we are very silent to-night."

"We are, Jack. Norah, alaunah, 'tis dull you'll be."

She shook her head.

"Myles, do you remember how you used to tell us stories, Norah and me, in the old days? There was Pettigo and Ennis fair, and Connemara wakes, and Connaught fights. Do you ever think of them, now?"

"Never, Jack; 'twas in the ould bad days. Norah knows all about it. I tould her myself."

"I've forgotten, father," said Norah.—"So have I, Myles," said Jack. "It was not to bring them up in your mind that I asked if you remembered the stories. Only I thought I would tell you one, if you would like to hear it."

"Sure I would," said Myles languidly, "if Norah would."

Jack looked at her and began clearing his throat. "About a thousand years ago, or it may be two thousand, because the books have got confused, and so the dates are all as wrong as the repealer's facts."

"Jack, ye're takin' advantage," said Myles, waking up.

"Well, then, it doesn't matter how long ago. But there were once a girl and a boy. The boy's name was John, but they called him Jack."

"Aha!" cried Myles, revived and alert. "May I have my

pipe in here, Norah asthore? That's my dear girl. And now, Jack, the story. The colleen's name was Norah."

"Of course."

"Av course. When ye're done blushin', my princess of Pettigo, where you ought to have been born, give me a shavin' of paper for a pipelight. Go on, Jack, 'tis a mighty fine story."

"They were brought up by a kind-hearted man, who was the girl's father."

"He was a dhrunken scoundrel," said Myles. "I knew him well. That is, I didn't, but my great-great-grandfather fifty hundred times removed, who was then the king of Ennis, often said he'd live to be hanged."

"His Majesty was not always a prophet to be depended on," said Jack. "Well, things happened so that after the little maid was five years old and the boy was nine, or thereabouts, this good man had to give them up, in order to get them educated. The girl went off to stay with a Saxon princess, not so beautiful as she was good"—

"Thru, Jack, gospel thru."

"And the boy with a priest who wore a white robe on Sundays and read books all the week, and was the best man that ever lived. Don't interrupt, Myles. Well, the boy, a selfish, conceited young dog, took to reading books too, and was never so happy as when he was reading books and learning to make things out of iron and steel. And he never, or hardly ever, gave a thought to the little maid at all."

"O Jack!" said Norah.

"A more selfish boy never lived. Meantime, the little girl was growing up too. She grew up so beautiful that everybody fell in love with her, and the angels were jealous of her."

Myles took his pipe out of his mouth, and with the courtesy of a Castilian, stepped across the hearthrug, just one short step and a bit, and kissed his daughter's hand.

"I'd like to see the angel that could come up to her," he said, resuming his seat with a smile of blissful content. "Go on, Jack, 'tis a beautiful story."



"The angels were jealous of her," Jack repeated.

"Don't, Jack," Norah murmured.

"When she sang, it was like playing on the strings of your heart."

"It was, it was," said Myles.

"And when she spoke it was like music. Her hair was black, and she had dark blue eyes, so dark as to look almost black at first."

"Jack, I forbid you to go on with your description," cried Norah, blushing again. "If you have no story to follow, I will get up and go to bed."

"Wait—I am coming to the story. The girl became a woman, and everybody said she was fit to be a queen——"

"Jack!"

"And what was better, she had never forgotten the boy she used to play with. Every year, when her father came to see her, she used to ask after Jack; and all the year round, she used to think about him; he all the time never thinking about her at all."

"That was because he was learning to make himself clever," said Norah, "and had something else to do."

"Don't go beyond the story, Norah. Well, the boy became a young man and went to live with Myles, little Norah's father, and worked in the king's foundries, where he made machines and engines and all sorts of wonderful things, and thought at first about nothing but getting rich. But he made the acquaintance of a lady who was dressed in velvets and silks, and who called herself a princess, though she was nothing, really, but a common kitchen maid, as every true princess would see at a glance; but she was clever, and knew how to deceive people and make them think that they were in love with her."

Then Myles turned very red. But Norah didn't notice him, because she was looking shyly at Jack, and she was trembling.

"She got hold of the young man when he was only eighteen, and used to make him sit with her of an evening. She played to him, and sang to him, gave him delicate little

dinners dressed daintily for him, and one night, when they were all alone, she made him sit at her feet and say he loved her."

"She's a witch," groaned Myles.

"Then she made him write her letters. Not one letter, but hundreds, in which the boy, who knew hardly any other woman, told her over and over again all his fancied love."

"Poor Jack!" said Myles.

"So it went on, and nothing happened for a time. Then the colleen came home to her father; and at sight of her and at speech with her, the foolish fancy flew out of that young man's heart like a dream of the night. He feared that all his imagined love was a delusion, and that the woman, the pretended princess, could be nothing in the world to him. He told her so. She laughed at him, told him that it was a passing whim, and dared him to break it off. So he was afraid. But then, bit by bit, he saw, talking to the colleen every day, what true love meant; he saw what a woman should be, and what life might be made with such a woman by his side. And then, overpowered by passion, one day, Myles, he did what he ought not to have done—he told the girl, the Princess Norah, that he loved her, but that he was engaged to another woman."

"Hush, Norah, hush, my pretty," cried Myles, holding the girl to his heart, as she half stepped, half knelt across to him, and fell into his arms. "Don't cry, alaunah. Sure, 'tis the most beautiful story that ever I heard. Go on, Jack, and more power to your elbow."

"Then he went away. While he was abroad, his heart was full of Norah. He thought about her every day and all the night. He learned to loathe the name of the other woman. He came home, and a second time he told his Norah all the sad story. Then he went to the other woman and told her. Again she laughed in his face, tried to cajole him, and then she threatened him. He left her at last, declaring that, do what she might, he would never set foot in her house again."

"And then, Jack?" asked Myles.

"That's all, Myles," he said. "Forgive me, and tell us that we may love one another."

Myles did not answer, but the tears came into his eyes and trickled down his seamed and worn cheeks. Norah stayed where she was. Presently he raised her, and taking her hand, laid it in the great brown fist that belonged to Jack.

"Whom should she marry but you, Jack? Would she be my own daughter, my Norah, if she did not love you better than herself?"

And then, with great presence of mind, Myles left them together.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"**I** OFFER you, Armstrong, a handsome salary, dependent on results," said Mr. Bayliss, in his own private office, "but no partnership. You shall work this power of yours to my advantage, and no other's. That is my offer."

"Then I refuse it," said Jack.

"Very well. Go now, and see what Perrymont will do."

"That is what I intend to do."

"I took this boy," said Bayliss, putting his hands into his pockets, and looking ahead as if he were addressing posterity, "when he had not a penny and knew nothing. I trained him. I gave him employment. I taught him his trade. And now I offer him a handsome salary—a handsome salary. He turns upon me, like the worm, and goes to Perrymont."

"It is true that you took me as a boy," said Jack, "and for nothing. It is also true that if my father were living, he would be your partner still, and you would be only half as rich as you are now."

A random shot, but it hit between wind and water. Bayliss changed colour.

"I have nothing to do with might-have-beens. I am a practical man. I have had small opportunities, and I have had great ones. But I never let one slip. You, Armstrong, are one of my small ones."



"On the contrary," said Jack, "I am one of your great ones."

"Are you here to bully me, or am I here?"——

"To bully me? Neither, Mr. Bayliss. I am here having proved myself the possessor of a power that will make me rich. You offer to make me a servant. I will not be a servant. I intend to be a master. If not a master in your works, then in other's. You know that I am not friendless."

"You may go to Perrymont," said Bayliss. "Come back if you like, when you have seen him. My offer is still open. Oh! there is one other thing. Your eccentric friend, Mr. Myles Cuolahan."

"Your old associate, in old days."

"That is an infernal lie, if he said so," burst out the *parvenu*.

"I say it is an infernal lie. Tell him I said so."

"I think I had better not. It is the truth, and you know it. He was an associate of yourself and of my father, when you all drank together, and were proud of being the friends of the last Armstrong left in Esbrough, poor though he was."

"We are proud of our family, then, among other things, Jack Armstrong, you will eventually bring yourself to the devil."

"Perhaps. Good-evening, Mr. Bayliss."

Bayliss, left alone, began, with the marvellous rapidity which was his strong point, to make estimates and plans. "He would bring thirty thousand a year to the concern. Would it be worth while to let him have his terms? Son of my old partner. Esbrough will never forget that. How the old things strike and crop up again—crop up again." He fidgeted in his chair. "Bah! as if anything would hurt me that might crop up. There are those papers at the banker's. They have had them for fifteen years. I will fetch them out, and destroy them. Then, if they are asked for, I can say that they are lost and the Bank knows that they were once in existence. I will burn them all. Fool that I was! And yet, the safety of it. And it was the making of me."

When a certain fear came over him his form seemed to

shrink, and his full round face suddenly became crossed with dimples.

"It was the making of me. They wanted to know if I was a responsible man. I showed them the papers. The land was mine by deed of transfer, signed, witnessed and all; signed by me, witnessed by the old clerk Kislingbury, dead and comfortably out of the way, and the fellow Bastable, the rogue whom I sent away—abroad. He has never come back since. The land was mine, and the vein was mine; all the rest was easy. Paul Bayliss, my boy, such acts are like rebellions. If they are successful, they are great strokes of policy. If they fail, they are great crimes. Mine has not failed. It has prospered. I defy the Fates to do me any harm. To-morrow I get the papers out of the Bank, and I destroy them. There are no copies. Who can swear to a forge—to a signature when there is no signature to swear to? And if my word is not as good as Bastable's, even if he is living, which is not likely, what is the world coming to? Paul Bayliss is a millionaire. Paul Bayliss is a justice of the peace. Paul Bayliss shall be a Baronet, before he is done. Baronet? By Gad, he shall be a Baron—first Lord Esbrough, and shall pass his title on through his daughter to his grandchildren. Men must take their opportunities, or must make them."

Here a knock came to the door. It was Hodder. "I beg your pardon, sir. Can I have five minutes?"

Mr. Bayliss, who had been walking up and down the room with his great shock of brown hair a good deal dishevelled, ran his fingers through it, and instantly assumed his magisterial air.

"I was making a few troublesome calculations, Hodder. But go on—go on. What is it?"

"I am afraid, sir, that I have discovered a bad business."

Mr. Bayliss took out his watch. "Five minutes only. Come to the point."

"Smith has forged a cheque."

"Forged a cheque? Do you mean to tell me that an *employé* of mine has forged—actually forged—a cheque?"

He filled himself out and puffed his cheeks, like an offended turkey cock.

"I am sure of it," said Hodder. He gave him a paper.

"That is not my signature, and a clumsy imitation. Hodder, it is a wicked world. I had confidence in Smith. Was not his salary increased last January?"

"It was, sir. Ten pounds."

Bayliss looked at him, and at the cheque. "Ten pounds. We try to help them who work for us, Hodder, and this is our reward. This is . . . our . . . reward. Well, . . . well."

Hodder began to stammer. "I brought it to you, sir, at once."

"Of course."

"And . . . and . . . if I might speak a word for the poor fellow."

"Speak, Hodder." Mr. Bayliss seated himself. "I am a magistrate, but forget that. Say all you can."

"He is recently married. His wife is ill. He thought, perhaps, that he could replace the amount, or get a real cheque, or something. He is in dreadful misery of mind. If you would only pass it over."

"Hodder, how many men have I got in my employ?"

"I don't know, sir, within fifty or so."

"There are many hundreds, at least, as you *do* know. I should think your zeal in my service might have led you to know accurately how many there are, if only to show the importance of the works. But let that pass. If we let this one wrong act go unpunished, it will be an inducement to others to do the same. A. B. is hard up—A. B. steals. We are to have pity on A. B. No, Hodder. I am sorry—I am more than sorry. Smith has a wife, and he belongs to a respectable family. It will be a bitter blow to them, but it is a blow that must be dealt in mercy to the others. Let every one on these works, on Paul Bayliss's works, know, that if he is in distress he may come to the master. But if he steals, the law must take its course. Forgery! And on MY works," Hodder was silent. This was grandeur. "Pro-



secute, Hodder. Put the thing out of my hands at once. I am a witness, I suppose, because this signature is mine. You have spoiled my dinner, Hodder."

Hodder went out. In his own office was a young man, little more than a boy, with white face and trembling limbs. "It won't do, Smith," said Hodder. "Damn him! He is as hard as nails. We are to prosecute."

"Oh! my poor wife," groaned the miserable forger. "Who will tell her?"

"There's a chance," whispered Hodder. "Take the train to Hull. Take the steamer—one of our own iron steamers—to Spain. It goes to-night. Then you can get across somehow to South America. They won't look for you. When you are there, with an assumed name, write to me *here*, when no one will suspect, and I will send you your wife. Get away quietly, and I will give you four-and-twenty hours' start, and tell your wife something that will put her off the scent. I'm not a rich man, but here is something to help you as far as Spain. You may get a passage for nothing, if you make out that you are going for the firm, but don't try it on if you can help it."

"God bless you for ever!" cried the man. "And you will not tell my wife all?"

"Nothing. Only, if there is a row, we will make her believe that your man did it. Now, write her a line quick, and be off."

At five o'clock, Hodder presented himself again to his employer. "Have you got a warrant out for Smith's business, sir?"

"I thought it was your business, Hodder. Well, get one at once."

"Yes, sir, as soon as I can. I suppose to-morrow will be time enough for the arrest."

"Well, when Smith comes to-morrow he will be met by what he little expects."

Hodder sighed. "Yes, sir. If every one had his deserts"—

"What the devil do you mean, Hodder?" Bayliss faced

him with an expression so savage that the foreman only stammered, and walked out.

When, next morning, it was discovered that Smith was missing, Bayliss heard the news from Hodder, and told him to institute a search. But as Hodder did nothing, and as other events occurred, Smith got off free. In fact, a few months later, Smith returned to Esbrough, after a visit to Paraguay, and took away his wife, bearing still, so to speak, his sword. The moral of which is, not that you are to forge a cheque when you are hard up, dear young friend starting in life, because that is wicked; nor is it that you are to help the wicked man to turn away from the consequences of his wickedness, because that is compounding of felony; nor that you are to let off your servants when they err and trespass, because that is the weakness of generosity; but it is . . . "He may run who reads," and we will not spoil the story by adding the moral.

Jack went to Captain Perrymont. The Captain heard him at full length.

"I see your drift, my boy," he said. "I should like to help you because you are an Armstrong. But I cannot, because I have made up my mind to have nothing to do with new things. I am rich enough, and so is my son. The devil of it is that we can't help getting richer. Where the fortunes of the Perrymonts and Baylisses will end, Lord knows. I'm ashamed to see the money pouring in, and we not knowing what to do with it."

"Well, sir. Then you will have nothing to say to me."

"Everything to say to you. I like you. Frank likes you. Come and dine as often as you please, and the oftener the better. But I won't make myself richer by your means."

Jack went away as sad as the young man who was bidden to sell all he had. He had got a great thing: a power which no other man possessed, he looked to it for the establishment of his own fortune, with all the collateral issues that a generous and unselfish man could see springing therefrom. He had returned with a sudden confidence and exultation. And this was the result: Paul Bayliss would make him a servant,

and Captain Perrymont would have nothing to do with him at all. The inventor who has worked out an idea that no one will back up, though it would regenerate civilisation; the young fellow who has got a carpet bag full of poems which no one will publish; the novelist who has a romance that no one will buy; the dramatist who has a play that no one will act; the disappointment of all these together would not make up that which filled poor Jack's breast as he left Perrymont and walked quietly away. People met him and shook hands. Frank Perrymont shouted to him across the street; he mechanically answered, and passed on. That morning he had been a rich man, able to marry his Norah. He was now a poor man. That morning he had been successful. He was now ruined. Presently there met him Mr. Bayliss himself—he walking slowly down the street, looking out, in fact, for Jack's return.

He beckoned him. "Well, Armstrong, what says Perrymont?"

"He says . . . in fact, he will have nothing to do with me."

"Good. Now, I make you my offer over again."

"And I refuse it. I will be no mere servant."

"You talked of setting up a Company here. You can try, of course. But see what they would say in London of a Company in opposition to Paul Bayliss."

"I can wait," said Jack. "But I will work my power yet, and from my own hand, too."

"Try to work it here, my young Jack, and you will have Paul Bayliss against you at every turn. There is not a man in all this place that does not belong to me somehow or other. Look at that man across the street. You see how he takes off his hat to me. He owes me nothing. I have never given him a penny. Yet he is obsequious, because I could, if I pleased, smash him. I could smash them all if I liked. Those who get in my way I do smash. If you get in my way I smash you. Remember, that in Esbrough I am king, and I mean to be king. You may be one of my subjects, and if you do your duty you will be paid for it. I rule here. And now make war with me if you dare."



He strode off, puffing his cheeks like some infuriated bubbly jock in a stable yard, leaving Jack on the curbstone, half amused and half savage. Scrape the rust off the man who has "made himself" manners as well as money, and you find, below, the man as he was before he was made. Paul Bayliss was as coarse, as self-seeking, as vulgar, in these days of splendour, as when he was the beggarly partner in a ruinous scrap iron factory, and got drunk whenever he could spare five shillings or borrow that sum from poor Johnny Armstrong.

"War!" said Jack. "Well, let us have war. I will go and see Mr. Fortescue. Perhaps, after all, he is too big for me."

Then the humorous side of the thing seized him, and he went home laughing as he walked, so that the sentimental girls who met him thought their Jack was frivolous, and all the frivolous girls thought their Jack was charming. For among the women of all classes and all ages, from Ella, ruling sovereign of beauty, to the humble factory girl, there was unanimity of opinion—Jack Armstrong was the production of which Esbrough might chiefly boast; and Jack was, so far as was known, free, Norah Cuolahan being, presumably, a sister only. It was true that he went to Mrs. Merrion's, but so did a good many people. And she was old enough to be his mother.

"There goes Jack Armstrong."

"I like him best when he is meditating in church," said Ethel the pensive, "his noble brow is marble white. Did you ever see him smile? Oh—h! It makes you understand the curving lips that the novelists talk about."

"I like him best," said Fanny the flirt, "when he's laughing and talking. Did you ever waltz with him? Oh—h! It makes you understand being held up tight, like Ouida talks about."

"There goes Jack Armstrong!"

"I call that a man, girls," said Poll, one of the hands. "He don't fool about. He works like a man, and he fights like a man; and he treats a pretty girl like a man. Lord! he's chucked me under the chin a dozen times. Glad to see you back again, Handsome Jack."

"How are you, Poll? How are you all, girls?" answered Jack, at the same time taking off his hat to Ethel and Fanny.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"**B**UT you have lost nothing, Jack," said Norah, anxious to find the rosy side. "You have escaped the clutches of a greedy man. That is all."

"I wish it were all. What the greedy man, as you call him, says is true. He is absolute master in this place. No company, unless it were far stronger than any I could get together, would dare to work here in the teeth of Paul Bayliss. He is King Paul, Emperor Paul, Pope Paul, in Esbrough."

"There are other places besides Esbrough, Jack."

"Not for me, Norah. You know my history. It came upon me like some great gift from heaven—the knowledge that I belonged to a once honourable race. This place is full of Armstrongs: the church holds their bones; and the old people here look upon me with respect because I am an Armstrong, so that the desire has grown upon me to be a leader in this town and no other. I seem to belong to the very soil of the town. I want to make the old name rise again."

"And you will, Jack—you will," said the girl. "But, oh! Jack, if you are to be a great man, how can you love me who have no family traditions to help you out?"

"My love, are you not the Countess of Connaught? Don't we know all about the ancient kings from whom the Cuolahans, and the MacSwires, and the MacBriartys, and the MacSwineys, your cousins, are all descended?"

Norah laughed. It was only a suburb of a new city, with little villas, spick-and-span, their fronts smeared with the smoke of the factories, their gardens encrusted with the soot, the air dank with smoke and fume. What a place to talk of kings and great families!

"You love me, Jack. That is enough. I will be nothing more, and we will have no questions. Take me back now,

for my father will be wanting me to talk to him. Is he not improved, Jack?"

"Myles is a gentleman, Norah, and a nobleman born. He condescends to collect rents. When I was a boy he was the grandest of men to me, the kindest and the strongest. You ought to have seen him fight Patsy MacNulty."

"Don't, Jack."

"I won't, Norah. But you have no reason to be ashamed of your father. Go back now, and send your boy to bed. He is getting feeble, that boy, and I fear he will not arrive at years of discretion. I will join you presently."

But Norah saw no more of Jack that evening. For when he left her at the gate, and pulled out a short wooden pipe to help him through half an hour's silent colloquy alone with himself, he became aware of a woman watching him. Jack did not like being watched. It was not the first time that the uneasy feeling had crossed his mind that some one was hunting him down. So he went up to the woman and confronted her.

"Mrs. Bastable!" for it was that worthy lady, "if you've got any message for me from your cousin Jenny, or Adelaide, or Pamela, or whatever she chooses to call herself, you may go away without giving it. For she may do her—I mean, she may do whatever she likes, and I will fight her."

"I've got no message, Mr. Armstrong," said the woman humbly. "It isn't that at all, Jack Armstrong. But I do want to help you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Bastable, very much. I do not see how you can, but I'm grateful all the same."

"Perhaps I may. Look, Jack," she laid her hand on his arm. "Lord! How like you are to your father. It was fields here, then, all the blessed fields, and no screeching engines, when we used to walk here, him and me, his arm round my neck, and me thinking he meant something. But of course it was only a young gentleman's play. What are we poor girls for in the world, but to please the men? And who is so happy as a girl that pleases a gentleman? He meant to amuse himself, Johnny Armstrong, and I—well, I cried and



was unhappy when he married. And if you'll believe a sinful woman who's had familiar sperruts by the twenty, I never loved Bastable a patch upon Johnny Armstrong."

"What has all that got to do with it, my good soul? Had we not better forget the past?"

"'Tis my past," she said, simply, "not yours. No, Jack, I can't forget, nor never could, when I was an innocent young girl, and loved the dearest man in the world. Not that he destroyed my innocence, don't think that. Poor Johnny was a good man and soft-hearted, even when the drink was in him. He was not like Bastable, the villain, with his mesmerising and clairvoyonging, and sperrut-rapping. Ah! dear—dear—dear!"

"Would you mind, Mrs. Bastable, coming to the point?"

She sighed heavily. "You want to get back to that sweet girl, Jack Armstrong. Well, you are like your father. He never could bear to be long away when he was in love. Good love, too; fierce love, passionate love, that made your heart go quicker, and your head reel when his strong arm caught your waist, and his kisses came like a hailstorm all over your face. I never saw the like. Girls like it, Jack. Don't be afraid when she wants you to leave off. Let her have all that is in your heart, and God bless her for a happy woman."

"You said," Jack returned calmly, "that you wanted to do me some service."

"Anything, Jack Armstrong. The smallest and the greatest. Now listen: It's your letters. Suppose I get those letters for you. I know where they are. Suppose I take them when she is asleep."

Jack shook his head. "That can't be thought of. I gave them to her, and she must send them back to me of her own free will."

"Men are such noodles," said his friend. "Well, have it your own way, Jack. Do you know when Paul Bayliss bought your father's last bit of land?"

"No, I do not."

"It was the only thing left to him: that and the partner-

ship that Bayliss got into his own hands. Only the day before he died, just one day, I met him: 'Johnny,' I said, for old friendship's sake, 'you're going on bad.' 'I am, Keziah,' he said. 'Then,' said I, 'why don't you reform, Johnny?' 'It's too late,' he said. 'Everything is gone, all but the field by the sea, and that would go too, but that I'm determined to leave the child unborn something. He shan't say, if it's a boy, that I stripped him of everything. It's only a forty acre lot and poor land, but it's the last bit left of all the Armstrongs' property. And it has only a little mortgage on it.' Then he left me, and the next day he was a corpse, if you can rightly call a corpse what was only a pile of white ash. But I remember his words as if it was yesterday."

Jack looked at her attentively.

"Once," she went on, "six months after he was dead, and before Bastable and I went up to London, I met Paul Bayliss and asked him where you were gone. 'Put out to nurse,' says he, 'and comfortably looked after.' 'The boy's got something,' I said. 'What something?' he says. 'The field next to Squire Perrymont's One Tree Meadow,' I said. 'You're a fool,' he says, and he changed all colours. Now, from that day to this he's never set eyes on me. I've been five years in this place, but Paul Bayliss does not know I am in the town at all, and wouldn't know me if he saw me; for, and it's a dreadful thing to think of, there's nothing in the world, not a dozen babies even, drags and tears a woman's good looks to pieces like having to do with familiar sperruts. Mesmerising is bad, and clairvoyonging makes you pale, but the sperruts it is which pull a woman down and makes her old before her time. And me only forty-eight."

"Are you quite sure of what you say, Mrs. Bastable?" asked Jack.

"I remember it all as if it was yesterday. It was fixed in my memory by that awful night when you were born, and by the look that Paul Bayliss gave me when he said, 'You're a fool, Keziah Bastable.'"

"Can you keep a secret, my good woman?"

She smiled superior. "I'm full of secrets. There's some secrets I can't let out if I was to try. Yours are that kind of secret. There's some I can't keep in. Jenny's are that kind. Don't ask me anything about poor Jenny, else I shall tell all out and disgrace the family. But tear me with pincers and pull off my flesh with red-hot tongs, as Bastable used to threaten when I wouldn't call up Peter, and you won't get anything out of me about yourself."

"Then promise to hold your tongue till I let you speak."

Jack left her, and instead of going home, strode off down town. The forty acre field close to Captain Perrymont's One Tree Meadow! It was there that the iron was found. That vein, the richest of all, richer than any in the Ravendale county, which ran straight under the sea, to be worked for miles, was in his father's ground. He had long known that. And his father, the day before he died, had declared it to be still his. If that were true—if that were true—but then it rested on the word of a silly woman. How should she know? The works were built upon it, with money that came out of it; half the fortune that Bayliss owned, at least, came from it; it was the beginning of his wonderful luck. How if—and here he paused and grew pale, looking about as if he were thinking an unworthy thing—how if Paul Bayliss had claimed the land by some fraud, by some statement that was not true?

The power of reputation is great. This huge Colossus so grandly strode across the town of Esbrough, which lived under his shadow, seeing no sunshine, so to speak, save what was reflected from his burnished legs, that Jack trembled as he thought that, after all, this gigantic idol might have feet of clay, like him in the prophet's vision.

"And if" . . . he thought—"if it should be so; if I can force him to prove his title. He offered peace or war. What if I give him war, in a quarter where he least expects it?"

He bethought him of a young lawyer, a man of his own age, with whom he had some kind of acquaintance, made upon the cricket field, and resolved to communicate the story and ask his advice. The young man, learned in all the crafts



and subtleties of the devil, was at home, alone, gloomy, with a pipe from which he strove to draw solace. Before him was a pile of letters, chiefly bills, and around him, for he sat in the same room which served him for office during the day, was an emptiness of tin boxes, a vacuity of shelves, an absence of parchments, which bespoke the scanty *clientèle*.

"Armstrong? Of all men in the world, I least expected you. Come in. Come in. I can offer you—no, there's only beer. But you can have that, and help me to swear at the world."

"I come on business, Clifton. I want your opinion on a long story."

"Welcome is the man who comes to have a talk with me in this cursed town. Thrice welcome he who comes to talk business. Now then."

"I hate Bayliss," said the lawyer. "That has nothing to do with the legal issues, but it shows that I will give you all the help I can. If he had been born ten thousand years ago, he would have done what the gentleman in the classical story did, made a bridge of iron and a chariot of brass, and driven across, thinking he was Jupiter himself. By Gad! he *has* made the bridge of iron already, and we must, in common Christian charity, try to prevent him making the other thing. However, let us see." He went on muttering and talking. "You are two and twenty. That is against us, because he has held for more than twenty years undisturbed, but if we can prove that he took the field and used it as his own, knowing that you were alive, and held it, letting the world know it . . . we might make it unpleasant for the red-faced Jupiter. Or if we could force him to show his title-deeds, and he had none, we might make this bloated Cræsus wish he had never been born. And, if we do anything rash, Jack Armstrong, he will be down upon you and me like one of his own steam hammers. As for me, I am smashed already; but I should not like you to be smashed as well."

"Never mind me. Think it over, and give me your advice."

"It's a queer business, Jack. I believe you will turn out to be the original Jack the Giant Killer. Your boots—no, they appear to be not unlike my own. The bean, is that planted? Is the old woman frightened? . . . The fact is, my dear boy, that I am so taken aback with the trembling delight of attacking this great big bloated porpoise, that I feel like a girl going to be married, or like a boy going into the sea for the first bathe of the year, or a soldier going into a battle. We may want money. Have you got any?"

"None of my own. If we have a case, I could get money."

"I do not think we shall want it. The question is, how he got that field. Land doesn't change hands like shillings. If a man gets a meadow he gets a bit of paper with it. Your father died suddenly, and nobody took the trouble to look into his affairs. Mr. Bayliss allowed you to be carried off anywhere. That is fishy. Then he never inquired after you; that is fishy again, considering you were his partner's son. When he made your acquaintance again, after an interval of sixteen years, he began by being suddenly taken faint, like a man brought up with a short rope. That is more fishy still."

"I will have no buying off, or compromises," said Jack. "I will have the whole thing cleared up or not embarked in at all."

"So you shall," said the lawyer. "All the suitors say that at the beginning. It is an understood thing. Perhaps, as we get on, we shall see the necessity of a compromise. Now leave me to think things over. A partnership: accounts never cleared up: a piece of land which was Armstrong's when he died, and was Bayliss's after he died: a great wind-bag of pretensions and pride to burst. It may hurt us, but as I have nothing to lose, I don't care. One thing, Jack Armstrong," he said earnestly. "If . . . if this case comes to anything, make me your lawyer. You know me. I am not dishonourable; I am not unskilful; but I want friends."

"Is that all?" said Jack. "Of course I will."

## CHAPTER XX.

THE next morning Jack sought counsel of his lawyer again. "I have been thinking of your affair all night. Now I have remembered a circumstance which may, or may not, be of use to us. First of all, however Bayliss got possession of the estate, he has held possession, undisputed, for upwards of twenty years."

"Yes. I am nearly twenty-three."

"That constitutes a title, unless we can prove that he gained it fraudulently. Now, before I was articled, I was a clerk in the old Bank, and I remember, ten years ago, seeing in the strong room a bundle of papers marked 'Title Deeds of Paul Bayliss, Esquire.' We must see these title deeds."

"That is so long ago. Most likely they have been taken out."

"It is most likely, on the other hand, that they are there. People let such things stay in safe places."

"Do you know any one at the Bank?"

"Yes; I know them nearly all, from manager to porter. I will try what can be done."

He left him, and Jack went to seek advice of Mr. Fortescue. The old clergyman heard the tale, and sighed wearily.

"It is the old story, I suppose," he said. "There will be a complication of interests. One man owes money to another; the other helps himself to payment, and defends his action. What can you prove? Your father and Mr. Bayliss were partners. Your father died; Mr. Bayliss went on."

"I will never give in," said Jack. "If I can prove that a single acre of my father's property ought to be mine, I will have it."

"Naboth's vineyard," said Mr. Fortescue. "No doubt the sons of Naboth were very disagreeable to Ahab's successors till they got back their own again. Well, Jack, you must have your own way. Tell your lawyer that I will call upon him."



"You are very good, sir. You are always more than good to me; but I will try to fight my own battles first."

"Fight him, Jack," said Myles. "Fight him. Make the pompous old rascal give it all back again—every farthing. It's yours. I know it. I remember your poor father, as well as if it was yesterday, telling all the world one night, and only a few nights before the fire, that there was still a bit of land left for the child that was coming. That was the bit of land; and to think that I found the iron on it that night when Cardiff—— I beg your pardon, Arthur"——

"Not at all, Mr. Cuolahan," answered the boy, who was half asleep by the fire. "Not at all. I hope I am not in your way."

"By no means," returned Myles. "In my way, bless you? The innocent!" he murmured. "Well, Jack, it was that very identical night I dug up the turf for that ould villain Bastable, while you were——well never mind where you were," with a glance at the boy.

"Where was Jack, Mr. Cuolahan?" asked Arthur, with an air of the greatest interest. "This is one of his stories, Norah. I will get it all out of him presently." Then he shook his venerable locks.

"Jack," said Norah, "do not be vindictive."

"I will not, Norah; but I will fight."

"We are all sinners," said Myles, "till Norah pulls us up. Norah, alaunah! you ought to have been a preacher and a boy. Faith, and a broth of a boy, and a broth of a preacher you'd have made!"

"But you will be sure, Jack, that you are right before you fight, will you not?"

"I am sure already," said Jack, with the confidence of a prophet. "I *know* it; though whether I can prove it is a different thing. But I know it. My father's sudden death left Bayliss free. No one asked any questions. He let me go under Myles's charge, and then, when I was out of the place, sat down quietly and took possession of the land, little thinking what it was worth. The vein cropped up within a

few inches of the turf, too, and might have been discovered by any one."

"I discovered it," said Myles, with great pride. "If a vein was a bit of hard rock, that smashed the spade and made my arms tingle for a week, then I discovered it, close by where that Bastable picked up a bit that was bruk, and looked at it hard, and then looked sideways at me, and then hurried off by himself. He went to sell his secret, I'm thinking."

"Did he know who was the owner of the field?"

"How could he? He hadn't been in the place for more than a year or two, when he married that Keziah woman, his wife. To think that she was an Esbrough girl, born and bred, and me not to know it when I took you there to do the hanky-panky, Jack. No, Bastable knew nothing. And what will you do next, Jack?"

The lawyer easily ascertained that the deeds were still in the Bank, and he then went before one of the magistrates and made an affidavit, by virtue of which he obtained an injunction to restrain the delivery of the deeds to Mr. Bayliss, and liberty to take copies of them. And the same day he wrote to Paul Bayliss, calling upon him, in the name of Jack Armstrong, to produce the accounts of his partnership with John Armstrong, deceased.

Bayliss was sitting at breakfast, Ella pouring out his tea.

"I used to think, Ella," he said, "that young Armstrong was better than most young fellows. But he is worse, Ella; he is worse." She looked at him with surprise. "They are all alike. Everybody looks after himself in this world. Where is gratitude? Where is common honesty? Young Smith, to whom I gave eighty pounds a year, forges a cheque and bolts. Young Armstrong"—

"Jack Armstrong?" The girl turned pale and red, but her father did not notice her. He was spreading butter in thick slabs on his toast.

"Young Armstrong," he went on, "who is really a clever lad, goes to Germany, picks up some knowledge, and comes back with it, offering to sell it to me—to ME, the man who

took him in as an apprentice for nothing—and what do you think he wants for it?"

"I am sure I cannot tell."

"Nothing but a partnership, Ella," he replied, with his grandest air. "Nothing but a partnership. Think of that! This young upstart."

"O papa! And you've often told me that the Armstrongs were once the owners of all Esbrough."

"What does that matter? He hasn't got a penny. He's a beggar. He lives on the charity of old Fortescue. And he actually has the audacity to propose to be my partner. Yes, John, give me the letters."

Ella got her letters and began to read them. When she had finished she looked up. Her father was sitting opposite her, rigid, his eyes fixed; the blood had left his face, which was pale and sunken; his trembling hands held the letter which he had just read. His lips were shaking as if he was trying to articulate words.

"Father!"

He neither moved nor spoke. Then she started up and took his hand. The letters rustled.

"No," he said, in a hoarse voice. "No. Don't dare touch them. Don't dare read them. Go away, girl. Be off, I say."

Paul Bayliss had once or twice in his life been rough with his daughter, but never like this.

"How dare you touch my letters? How dare you offer to read what is sent to me?"

"Papa," she cried, "I never thought of touching them. I never dreamed of reading them."

He stood up and stared about the room with a wild look of terror. Then he turned to his daughter, the pretty child whom he had brought up so tenderly, and who winced beneath his eyes like a frightened pet.

"Forgive me, Ella," he said. "A sudden attack—what was it? A giddiness. I am better now—better now—much better now."

"Will you have the doctor, papa?"



"No, I want no doctor," he groaned. What bodily disease, what pain and suffering, would not have been preferable to this blow? "I want no doctor—now!"

"Will you take something, papa?"

"Give me a glass of brandy. There, don't ring. Go and get it."

He sank back again, while his daughter went for the spirits, and tried to understand the position. She brought the decanter with a liqueur glass. He drank three, one after the other.

"Ella," he whispered, "do not breathe a word of this attack. It is the second I have had in my life. The first was when—when—when young Armstrong was brought to me by Cuolahan, seven or eight years ago. I thought I had got over that. And now he comes back again, and I have another. The boy will be the death of me. Don't say a word, Ella, mind. If you chatter I will never forgive you. Do you hear? I will cut you off with a shilling. . . . My poor Ella." He took her terror-stricken face in his hands and kissed it. "My poor Ella, we do not know what a day may bring forth. Yesterday I was strong and proud; to-day I am weak and humble—and afraid," he added, "afraid."

"You are ill, papa. You are not yourself. Let me send for the doctor."

"No. I am going to the study. Leave me there. If I want anything I will ring, and you shall answer the bell. Leave me by myself."

He took his letters and went to his own room, a room fitted up with shelves, full of books which he never read, desks and writing-tables which he never used, and paper on which he never wrote. Then he locked the door and sat down, and buried his head in his hands to think. The first thing he did, curiously, was to go fast asleep. No opiate could have laid him more completely at rest than the sudden blow he had just received.

It was nine o'clock. At twelve he awoke with a start of surprise, with an uneasy and anxious look, with a sudden pang at the heart that brought him back to his misery.

Count up, reader, if you can, the few nights in your life when you have had dreams of a rapture so great and glorious as to lift you up to heaven. You will find that they were the nights preceding your most unhappy days, when you had sought your bed with the misery of impending suffering, anxious to bury yourself in forgetfulness for but a few hours. You awake, and the transition is so dreadful as to magnify your present woe tenfold. So Bayliss, waking from a dream of some great bliss, in which he, Paul, was clothed with white raiment and crowned with gold, and led forth before his fellows as the great, the good, the only one, suddenly remembered the letters that lay on the table, and straightway his heart fell like lead.

"I am a fool," he said, "I am a fool. Every man can be bought off. The boy wants money." Then he read the letters again. "The Bank stops the deeds. Oh! that I had taken them out two days ago, as I intended. Let me answer this."

He took his pen and wrote. His hand was shaky, and the words would not form themselves. He made half a dozen copies, and at last was satisfied.

"Dear Stewart," he said. Observe that his style was generally "Dear sir," or "Sir," *tout court*. "Dear Stewart, I have received your mysterious communication: keep the deeds by all means. When you can find time to let me know the nature of the threat implied, do so. I may tell you *in confidence*, that I have had another letter inviting me to render an account of my partnership with the late John Armstrong. That was dissolved twenty-two years ago. Please tell me if you have those books among the rest of my papers. And if so, keep them as well as the deeds. I am too busy to look into these petty things myself, but you can tell me if you want help, and I will get my London solicitor to advise."

He read this over a dozen times. Yes, it was bold; it was fearless; it treated the affair as beneath contempt. And then he read the other letter.

"Produce the accounts!" he ground his teeth. "I think

I see myself producing the accounts. Why, I burned them twenty years ago. All but the memorandum-book."

He opened a drawer and took out a little book. "Everybody may read this," he said. "F. G. to A. B. That means Johnny Armstrong to Paul Bayliss. Five hundred pounds—two hundred pounds—one hundred pounds. Paul Bayliss, face the thing. Tell yourself the beastly truth. Truth is always beastly. You never had a penny. You took loan upon loan from Johnny Armstrong and his wife, though it went in drink. You had the luck of the devil, and you lost it as fast as you got it. Then came the fire, and the father died, and the child was carried away. No one knew about the loans, for the papers were all in my hands, and I burned them all. So far I am safe—safe. I can say that the books were with the senior partner and were burned with the fire. Who is to say they were not? And then the land—the field—the only point that I have got to face. I have held it for twenty-three years. But I for—I wrote the deed, and signed it. Witnessed by Jacob Kislingbury, clerk to the parish. Dead!—good man. And by Benjamin Bastable, lawyer's clerk. Where is he? Can he ever come back? No. He would have come to me for money. And yet." . . . He looked at his watch. It was only one o'clock. He got up, and looked at his face in the glass. It was transformed. The confident bearing had gone out of it. The pride had gone. A look of cunning, fear, and treachery was in their place. And one who knew Paul Bayliss well might have said that the look had been there always, hidden under a thin varnish of simulated self-respect.

One o'clock. He burned to know if Bastable had returned. But how to find out? He could not prowl about the streets, searching for Bastable. He ordered his carriage. Ella came furtively from her hiding-place to know if he was better. He greeted her kindly. "I am not well, dear; but I am better. I am going to the office on business, and shall be home early. Don't fuss about me, Ella."

At the works he sent for Hodder. "Do you remember, Hodder, a man who was about the place some years ago?"



Let me see. When first we hit on the vein, and before I took up the Ravendale mines—a man named Bastable?”

“I remember him well, sir. He used to talk about mesmerism and spirits.”

“The same. He went away, I believe.”

“Yes, sir; went to America. And never came back.”

“Oh! never came back. I have a reason for wishing to see that man, Hodder. You are sure he never came back?”

“Quite sure, sir. If he had come back, his wife would have told me.”

“His wife?”

“Yes, sir. He married my second cousin, Keziah Kislingbury, and deserted her. She’s living with a lady in the Ravendale Road, Mrs. Merrion, a widow companion I think she calls herself.”

It was lucky that Bayliss’s back was turned to the speaker, or his look of terror and agony would have been noticed. A moment or two passed in silence. Then Bayliss spoke in a harsh and unnatural voice. “Send me a boy, Hodder, to fetch Mrs. Bastable; or, no, I cannot write. Go yourself and bring her. With Mrs. Merrion! Living with Adelaide!—and I never knew.”

Then, as one in some trouble, he sat down by the fire and waited. They brought him cheques to sign—he signed them all without a word. They brought him orders for approval—he approved them all; they brought him reports, which he laid upon the table. And with the swiftmess of a telegraphic message, the news ran through the works that employed a thousand men, girls, and boys, that their revered and dreaded chief was ill. Ill he was in mind, and sore cast down. But Paul Bayliss was not going to throw up the sponge. “I will buy them off,” he said, “I will buy them off. Young Armstrong, curse him, shall have everything—promised; and as soon as I get the deeds I will burn them, and laugh in all their faces—damn them!”

Then came Hodder with Mrs. Bastable.

“Are you Mrs. Bastable?”

“I am, sir,” said Keziah quietly.

"What do you know about this business?" uttered Bayliss abruptly. "No," he went on, "how should you? Where is your husband, Mrs. Bastable?"

"I wish I knew, sir."

"Then he has not come back?"

"No, sir; he has not come back."

"Swear it—swear upon the Bible. No; why should you tell me lies? So he has not come back—not come back—and no one knows where he is? So, so. That is good." He was talking half aloud in his excitement. "Mrs. Bastable, you will tell me when he does come back, will you not, *if* he does come back?"

"Lord, sir! Yes, I will tell you; not that it makes any difference to you where that wife-deserter has gone to."

"Well, only promise to tell me—then—then. And so, Mrs. Bastable, you live with Mrs. Merrion! and how is it I have never seen you there?"

"You have, sir, plenty of times, only you did not notice me."

"Ah! perhaps not. And how is my lovely widow, eh, Mrs. Bastable, eh? How is the charming Adelaide? Give her my compliments, will you, and say that I hope to run up and call upon her to-night."

The danger in his mind once removed, Bayliss became sportive again. Bastable not back? Why, that would give him time. He would buy them off. He took no notice of the letter ordering him to produce his accounts, went home, had a pleasant little dinner in his own study, making his illness of the morning a reason for dining alone and early, drank a bottle of port, and then drove back to his office. There he left his carriage and walked to Mrs. Merrion's, where he spent a charming evening with the widow.

## CHAPTER XXI.

IN the land of repentance it is always morning, and the sinners feel their position upon water only, no intoxicating drinks or other incentives to re-enter the paradise of fools being allowed. Mr. Bayliss awoke rather earlier than usual to the recollection that he was in a perilous state, and his spirits fell in one moment to the lowest point of despondency. "Bastable is dead," he kept on saying to himself. "Bastable is dead long ago. Who can say anything? Who can find out? At the worst, I will buy them off. . . . After all these years. . . . If I could get hold of those papers!"

He breakfasted in his study, telling Ella that he was better, but had a headache; and then, because he was restless, sent away his carriage, and walked into town. He fancied the people looked at him as he walked along the road. They did; not because he had forged a deed, and was afraid of being found out, but because he swung heavily along the road, his coat-tails flying behind him, in a quick, nervous way, different to his usual pompous walk. Then his face looked queer. The great red cheeks were pale; nervous twitching pulled his lips one way and the other; and his eyes were fixed. He went straight to the Bank, arriving there a moment after the doors were opened.

"What is this business, Stewart, that you wrote to me about? I was too much engaged yesterday to look into it."

The manager shut the door. "Those deeds of yours on which we advanced you money twelve years ago."

"Well; and what about those deeds?"

"They have filed an affidavit which—which—in fact, orders us to stop the deeds; and they have taken copies."

The manager noticed that his client changed colour, and he suspected *why*. He was an Esbrough man, and he knew the history of Johnny Armstrong. He suspected now why Paul Bayliss trembled and shook before him.

"You are not well, Mr. Bayliss; sit down."

"No; I am not well. I was ill all day yesterday, and I



am worse to-day. . . They have taken copies, you said?" He sat down, and tried to pull himself together.

"Yes, they took them yesterday; that is to say, young Clifton, who is acting for Armstrong, took them. You had better see your lawyer, Mr. Bayliss. A thing of this kind may be only a threat to extort money, though young Mr. Armstrong is not the man likely to do that."

"I am half mad, I think. What shall I do, Stewart? You know all about money matters. They want me to show my accounts of partnership with Armstrong's father. How can I? The books were burned in the fire that killed him."

"Your offices were not burned."

"No; but my partner had taken the books home with him to examine. It was not usual for him to do that; but as we'd had a dispute, things were going badly with us both, he had the books with him—had taken them, in fact, the very afternoon, after office hours, when the fire occurred."

"Well, that is one thing. But why do they want to copy the title-deeds?"

"I do not know. How should I know?"

"Well, Mr. Bayliss, no one knows of this business except ourselves, and as it is always delicate and dangerous work, raking up old affairs, I should think you might compromise; a few hundreds or so are nothing to you. This young man is the son of his father; he naturally wants to know what became of the family property. Take him into confidence, and make a friend of him."

There was a look in the banker's eyes which the millionaire did not like. Paul shook hands with him like some poor suppliant begging for help, and then he crept away, the clerks staring with wonder at his crestfallen look. The manager, when he was gone, sent for the hall porter, an old man, who had been a servant of the Bank for fifty years. He gave the man a few commissions, and began to talk carelessly to him.

"Did you see Mr. Bayliss this morning?"

"I did, sir, and very ill he looked. When I gave him the good-morning, he never answered."

"Yes, he seems ill. But he's getting on in age. How old is he?"

"Paul Bayliss? Let me see. I am sixty-seven. Paul Bayliss must be a good ten years younger. Fifty-seven, he is, I should say. Same age as poor Johnny Armstrong."

"You remember the death of his partner, I suppose?"

"Lord, sir, as if it was yesterday! It was New Year time, and we'd had a busy time here with people all day long paying in and drawing out. Johnny Armstrong came just before the shutters went up, and saw the manager. Poor fellow! It was four o'clock: and if he'd gone home to his wife, he might have been alive to this day."

"Did he not go home to his wife, then?"

"No; he went back to his office, and then he went to the public-house, and there he stayed till he went home drunk at ten o'clock, and set fire to his house and burned the place down, and himself too."

"Oh!" said Mr. Stewart. "You are sure he did not go home between four and ten?"

"Sure. Why it was all in the inquest. Mr. Bayliss gave his evidence, and said so."

"Ah! did he? That will do."

The Bank manager lay back and whistled softly. "I very much fear," he said, with an admixture in his expression of that joy which people feel at witnessing the woes of others, "I very much fear that we are going to have a pretty scandal. Paul Bayliss, founder of the English Chicago, as they say in the papers, the king of ironmasters, the employer of thousands, he to whom thousands look for their daily bread, as well as for their guidance and example—Paul Bayliss has been doing something queer. Let us see these papers."

He got the papers which were stopped, and turned over the pages. Among them was a conveyance, as short and simple as such documents can be made. It gave Paul Bayliss Johnny Armstrong's last bit of land. The witnesses were Samuel Kislingbury, clerk to the parish church, and Benjamin Bastable, lawyer's clerk. It was dated a month before the

death of Armstrong. The manager took another opportunity of talking with the old porter.

"I suppose," he said, "you remember all the old Esbrough people?"

"Bless you, sir! yes, every one. Most of them here still, some up and some down."

"Mostly up, I suppose."

"I don't know, sir. There's myself and my boys, just like my old father and his boys. Where we are, there we stick. Some folk are like burrs, you know. Well, and some are like thistledown, blown about the world, and never knowing where to settle. Look at Benjamin Bastable, now."

"Ay! ay! That is a strange name. Who is Benjamin Bastable?"

"He was a lawyer's clerk for one thing. He married Keziah Kislingbury; and then he turned magician: came down here with his wife just twelve years ago; then he ran away and left her. Never heard of again, and his wife a lone woman to this day."

"Thistledown—yes, like thistledown. Bastable was a native of this place, I suppose?"

"Oh no! not an Esbrough chap at all. He came about two and twenty years ago, just after poor Johnny Armstrong died!"

He looked again at the deed. Bastable had only come to that town after the death of Armstrong. It was dated, as I have said, a month before the death. "By the Lord! it's a forgery, and a clumsy one," he said to himself. "The Bank never examined it, and Bayliss, like a fool, never destroyed it."

Paul Bayliss resolved on a plan of action that evening, after a bottle and a half of port; his courage being thus screwed up to the point of taking the broadest ditches at a flying leap. "I will send for the boy to-morrow," he said; "we will have no more to do with lawyers. I will take him into partnership. He shall have what he wants. He shall have more than he wants. By Gad! he shall be a full partner in the whole concern. And he shall marry Ella, if



he likes. He cannot find out anything. I wrote it in an engrossing hand. I copied a deed word for word. I wrote the signatures so that the devil himself could not find out the difference. The clerk is dead, and Bastable gone away—dead too, likely. What have I to fear? It's a bugbear. Bastable dead? Of course he is dead. He went to America with the money I gave him. He told me that if he wanted any more he should write to me, and he hasn't written. Of course he is dead, long ago. And a good thing too." Then he drank another glass of port, and began to walk up and down the room.

"Why should not Armstrong be my partner? He is the son of my former partner. And why shouldn't I let him marry Ella, if I like? It's a good match on both sides: we'll call it a love match, and young Perrymont may go after that Norah girl."

He went into the drawing-room, where Ella was sitting alone. "Yes, dear. Don't ask me how I am, because it worries and does no good. I'm ill, but I daresay I shall be better soon. Give me a cup of tea, will you?"

He sat down and sighed wearily, looking round the great splendid room, in one corner of which his daughter sat like a fairy in a glade. All these glories threatened to depart from him, like a dream.

"I am getting old, Ella," he said, forgetting the tea. "I am getting old. Don't interrupt me, child. I have been thinking of taking a partner."

"Yes, papa."

"I sometimes think that young Armstrong would be the right man to succeed me. The son of my old friend and partner, you know. Who fitter? We were not always so rich as we are now, Ella, though you may not remember it."

"I remember it well, papa—the little house in"—

"There, there; we need not be so minute. We were poor and we are rich, that is enough. I will talk to Armstrong to-morrow. It is almost time, Ella, to find you a partner, too."

"O papa! I am in no hurry."

"Right, Ella, right. The man I mean is—is—but I will not tell you his name. Go to bed, my dear, and dream of wedding bells and orange-blossoms."

"And you, papa, will dream of getting better, will you not?"

"I will dream that I am well again. Ha! ha! there is nothing the matter with me, nothing at all. Only a little spasm now and then. Good-night, Ella, good-night." The girl went away. Presently her father went to bed too.

In the room of the girl, dainty with pretty hangings and costly trifles, a little head in a whirl with the thought of the strange thing that was going to happen to her. In the other, a massive apartment, where a huge four-poster, with immense curtains, stood in the centre of a room filled with massive mahogany furniture, Paul Bayliss lying asleep and dreaming heavily. He has not extinguished the lights, which are turned down low enough to cast deep shadows across the room. The sleeping gross red face is purple as he pushes it deeper into the pillow; the veins stand out in the dim light like black ropes upon his forehead; his hands are stretched out upon the bed and clutch the sheets. Paul Bayliss is far away from his splendid mansion. Curiously enough, he is, in spirit, sitting upright, looking about him. He knows that it is night, but somehow he sees clearly. He thinks he is in a small and narrow room, the walls of which are white-washed; above him is a little window, with bars across it; he is sitting on a mattress spread over a bench; there is a Bible at his elbow; he wonders where he is. Then he hears footsteps outside; a rap comes at his door. "Number a hundred and twenty-eight." "Here," he replies, mechanically, and then he remembers, suddenly, that he is in prison. In prison; Paul Bayliss the millionaire in prison. His position, the judge had remarked, only aggravated the offence. He had gone on for twelve years enjoying the proceeds of his crime. He had grown enormously rich through that crime; he had through that crime attained to an eminence that made his fall only the more signal, and ought to make his punishment the more exemplary. The boy who was the

rightful owner of all that he possessed was working, a common apprentice with the rest, in his works. For him he had done nothing. Nay, more; when the boy returned from the continent, and timidly offered to make him still richer at the price of a small share in the new formation of wealth, he had driven him away with words of contempt. The jury had not the power of bringing in another verdict. The evidence of the crime was complete. First, there was the absence of the legal technicalities, owing to the pretended deed being a slavish copy. Then there was the witness of the expert, who swore that the signatures were all written by the same hand; then the testimony of Keziah Bastable, who swore that her husband was not in Esbrough at the time of the signature; and lastly, the most damning circumstance of all, the water-mark in the paper was of more recent date. Truly, as the counsel for the prosecution observed, the prisoner was a clumsy forger. It was evident that this was his first crime. It was the act of an avenging Providence that he seemed to have actually forgotten the existence of the forgery, when he might any day have removed all evidence of the crime. The judge had gone on to point out to the public that a long course of selfish indulgence—it seemed an unusual line for a judge to take—had not only blinded the moral perception of the prisoner, but also probably partially destroyed his memory. At any moment he might have taken away the deeds and destroyed the forgery, when, no copy being in existence, he might have laughed at the law. Any day might bring his destruction. And as if it were not enough that all this array of witnesses should appear against him, at the last moment, during the trial, the man Bastable himself had appeared and sworn that he had never signed any such deed; had sworn, besides, that he had himself discovered the vein of iron on the property, and had taken three thousand pounds as a reward out of the first profits made, on the condition of going away. It was rare indeed, the judge said, that the annals of crime offered an instance so remarkable of infatuation. He should say little more to aggravate the misery and remorse of the



prisoner, but would sentence him to ten years' penal servitude.

Fool that he had been! Fool at every point. With the game in his own hand, the cards all trumps, and but one wrong card, he had deliberately played it. Ten years. Ten years to be locked up, silent and alone, in a white-washed cell; ten years to have no society but the chaplain, no change but the Sunday chapel; no book but the Bible—it would drive him mad. He seemed to rise and prowl up and down the little room. No pleasure, no joy, no pride of life any more; and when he came out of his prison hiding in oblivion for the rest of his days. "I shall be sixty-seven!" he answered. "I shall be sixty-seven, and an old man. Ella will hate me; not one of my friends will speak to me. It is bad now—but oh!—my God! it will be worse then. Ten years to wait! Perhaps a ticket-of-leave. And this only the second day!" He awoke with a groan, the beads standing on his forehead—awoke and sat upright in his bed, and looked round with a wild stare. He saw only the white walls of his cell; the familiar furniture of his own room was as a dream; he was asleep still, and beside him stood the ghost of his dead partner. "Paul," said poor Johnny, "I was a bad man, and I wasted everything in drink. But you had my bit of land left, and there was the boy. You had all that borrowed money, too; could you not have paid it back to him, at least with some of the interest? It's too late now. We are both sinners, Paul, but you are the worst. I never deserted a friend; I never forged a deed; I never turned my back upon the poor; I paid my debts. Now you are in prison, Paul—in prison for ten long years. You will have to work all day; you will be alone all night; you will have no drink, and I shall come and sit with you, when there is no one to interrupt us, and I will talk to you, Paul Bayliss, for the sake of old times." With a wild tossing of his arms, the wretched man awoke, and found it was but two o'clock, and that it was all a dream.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE night passed slowly on. What a night would that be when the veil of self-deception was wholly withdrawn and the cruel naked truth left, like some steep wall of granite cliff up which a man cannot climb, while the relentless tide sweeps slowly up the shore, to drown and destroy him. The wretched man paced his lonely room, tossing his arms in his unrest. He turned on the lights full; he lit the candles that stood upon the mantelshef; he fancied that behind him stood the ghost of his partner, accusing, grim, hideously threatening;—and before him, around him, above him, was the cell with its narrow walls, the stone bench, the Bible, and the ten years' sentence ringing in his ears. It was a dream, a nightmare, if you like, but such a dread as had the horrid semblance of prophecy; such a nightmare as personated a reality. So might Ahab have tossed in his sleep after the murder of Naboth; so might David, in his cedar palace, have seen at his bedside the murdered form of the man whom Joab had put at his bidding in the foremost front of the battle. From time to time he lay down, but not to sleep. For when his eyes closed there rose up again before him the grisly phantom of the prison, and he started again with an oath and a prayer alternate, to find relief in pacing up and down. Oh! slow and weary night to those who sleep not! Oh! swift and happy night to him who sleeps and wakes in the arms of one who loves him! Great and solemn mystery of night! when each withdraws from his fellows, and, perforce, communes with himself; when the paradise of imagination fades away, and that grim fortress of fact which is so like a prison shows clear and strong.

It was late in December, when the sun rises at seven. Paul Bayliss dressed himself at daybreak, and wandered forth in the stately gardens, wet now with continual dews, to seek rest and comfort. Rest and comfort there were none; the day dawned slowly—so slowly, with great banks of cloud; the cold trees, clothed with a scanty vestment of yellow

leaves, stood round him, and seemed to point their branches, threatening and pitiless, at his face ; the air was heavy and silent. The great house before him, which he had built himself, seemed staring at him behind the white blinds of the windows in a sad surprise ; and Paul Bayliss, for the first time in his life, sank upon a bank and dropped his head in his hands and shed tears that rolled pitifully down his cheeks. It is not only the innocent hunted hare that weeps ; the fox himself, after ten thousand shifts and turns have been tried, and all to no avail, will weep when the inevitable end is close to him.

“ It is hard,” he murmured, “ after what I have achieved—after this great and splendid career, to lose all for a single act of folly—of crime—call it crime, what does it matter ? It is done ; it must be faced. Fool ! to be terrified at a nightmare, at an undigested dinner, at a shadow, at less than a shadow, at nothing at all ! ”

He tried to reason with himself, but it was of little avail, for in his heart he *knew* the future that might be, and the days of bitterness which nothing but a miracle could avert. We are all of us so ; we have a Cassandra-like power of prophecy, inasmuch as, like the prophets to the kings of Israel, we, if we foretell anything concerning ourselves, foretell only disaster. And it always comes true. Paul Bayliss knew that he was found out. It was maddening to think that in their quiet beds lay sleeping young Jack Armstrong and Clifton the lawyer, the arbiters of his fate, while he was here cold, comfortless, and wretched, the King of Esbrough, waiting for what might please these dependents of his to do to him.

He walked through the wicket gate at the back of his garden and plunged into the plantation behind—his own plantation, his own planting. The ground was knee deep with the wet and fragrant fallen leaves ; on the branches sat the pretty pheasants, too lazy to move, although the light was strong ; the scarlet berries hung upon the mountain-ash, the holly was bright with red, a few wild flowers lingered still where the cold winds could not touch them, and the rays of



the sun could warm them yet. He trampled on them regardless. Presently he came to a pool; he knew it well, because he had caused it to be made; it was deep, so as to drain the coppice; it was broad, so broad that, as he thought, a man might lie at the bottom with no chance of being fished out; it was black to look at, and covered with a thick film of weed that might serve, he thought, as a fitting pall for one whose life had ended in sudden and terrible collapse. Should he end it so? As he stood and played with the thought, a thousand memories flashed across him, and all his life lived over again. It is so at decisive moments of our fate; we stand upon the brink and remember, not what will be, but what has been; the girl who answers the letter of her lover and remembers all the sweetness of the household she is going to give up: the youth who pauses before he commits the fatal act that robs him of his honour: the man who changes his fate by the stroke of a pen, they pause to think of the past. Paul Bayliss stood upon the brink. Why not end it? They call it cowardice, this temptation to end it all, when life becomes too dreadful to bear. Is it altogether cowardice? I think not. The future we know not; the present we know; whatever the future can give, we think it will be better than the dreadful present. Alas! we cannot tell that the present will always live with us. Like the exile who runs across the sea, we may change the sky, but not the wind. Paul Bayliss stood hesitating on the brink. One plunge, and it was done; one cold plunge into the weed-covered pool; one bubble rising to the surface, and his despair would be finished for ever. For ever! Who can tell? and if we were certain that such an act would cut the knot and set the captive free, be sure that not a living man but would be tempted at some moments of his life to take the knife and sever the silver thread. One plunge! he looked and thought. Above him the clouds parted and the fog lifted and the sun rose broad and glorious, though it was but a morning in December. The birds began to sing round him—not the summer birds which come for a season and leave us all through the time when most we want the beauty of their softness and their song, but those sad-

coloured birds which belong to all the year. But he sees nothing, he hears nothing; his eyes are fixed upon the black, cold water; he is thinking of the terrible future that may await him, and he is summoning his courage for the leap. He will take it—he will be free; farewell to the miseries of despair and ruin—farewell to nights of terror and days of suspense; he will bear no more.

He raises his arms as in the attitude of one who will spring from the bank. A step, a whistle, a voice! It is his own gamekeeper, gun on shoulder, dog at heel, who tramples through the underwood, cracking the dead twigs, breaking off the dead branches, tearing through the trailing arms of the blackberry bushes. Paul Bayliss recovers himself suddenly, and looks round him. It is a bright and glorious morning, the red sun shines in his face and brings back its colour; he turns his head, and lo! the phantoms of the nightmare disappeared, and Paul Bayliss is strong again.

His keeper was surprised to see him. "Good-day, sir. Out very early this morning, sir."

"Yes; I could not sleep. I got up to try the fresh air."

"Very good thing for you, sir. Beg pardon, sir. Try it every morning, sir."

"Ay! ay! well . . . yes . . . we will have a day here soon—as soon as you like." . . .

The master turned and walked back to the house a different man. His step was elastic, his heart was light; his thoughts were high again. What had worked the miracle? Sunshine and light. Paul Bayliss, who had been repentant, soft-hearted, sorry, pricked up his ears and looked about him. He was himself again, a fox-terrier, not thoroughbred, because he had a touch of the mastiff. He felt, through all his veins, the old familiar instincts of courage. His troubles, however, were not over.

He sat in his study at breakfast alone. The footman came in, deferential and quiet. "A person, sir, wants to see you."

"A gentleman?"

"No, sir, not exactly a gentleman. Rather looks like a common man, sir. Couldn't get his name. Said it was no

consequence, sir; and if you didn't see him, he could go down to the works."

"Well, let him come in. And, John, see that he wipes his boots."

The person came in : a short, fat man, with a large fringe of reddish-grey beard, short, and thick-set—a man who, unlike most men, conveyed no idea of any profession whatever. You can generally make a good guess at a man's habitual work, especially if you have visited the favourite public-houses of the trades at meal hours. But this man might have been anything. There was a shifty look about his eyes; his mouth was full, and his lips prominent; he was strongly built; his hands were white, and his fingers long and delicate—such fingers as belong to men skilled in musical instruments. And he was dressed, apparently, to look as much like an undertaker as could be managed out of a second-hand suit of rusty black. He came in, deposited his hat on the floor, and sat down. Then he turned slowly to Paul Bayliss. "You do not remember me, Mr. Bayliss?"

Mr. Bayliss did remember him. He flushed for a moment, and held his breath. Then, while great beads stood upon his swollen forehead, he went to his writing-desk. "Excuse me one moment, sir," he said. "I have a note to write, and I will be at your service."

He wrote his note.

"MY DEAR ARMSTRONG,—Come and see me instantly—  
instantly. I am ill, and I have a good deal to see to. Do not take any steps whatever, and let none be taken. I have to talk to you of your father.—Your father's oldest friend,

"PAUL BAYLISS."

Then he rang the bell, moving with uncertain step and a quick, anxious manner. The footman came, and he despatched the note with a whisper. "Take it yourself, James. If Mr. Armstrong is not at the cottage, look for him at Mr. Clifton's, the lawyer. Give it into his own hand, and bring me the answer. Be quick, and be sure."

The man took the epistle, and retired. Then Mr. Bayliss



turned to his visitor. "Now, Mr.— I don't know your name, sir."

"And yet it is only a dozen years since we met, Mr. Bayliss; only a dozen years, when Esbrough was only a little market town. Surely you remember me!"

"Let me think. I see so many faces."

"But not many like mine, Mr. Bayliss." That was true. It was so seamed and wrinkled; there were such multitudinous crow's feet about the eyes; such lines crossing and intercrossing about the forehead; such furrows about the mouth, that it was quite reasonable to suppose his face to be one of the rarest extant.

"Think again, Mr. Bayliss."

"Upon my word, I believe you are Mr. Bastable."

"And your belief is like the Apostles' Creed, Mr. Bayliss, because it's every word true."

"Mr. Bastable, Mr. Bastable, I thought when we parted that you had received so large a compensation for your discovery, of which I confess that I have profited, that you agreed not to return to this place."

"I did, Mr. Bayliss."

"I have even your promise in writing not to return, not to ask for anything more—to be content, in fact."

"You have, Mr. Bayliss, there's no denying it."

"Then what do you want of me?" The man shifted his legs, and appeared uneasy. "What have you been doing since you were here last? You began by deserting your wife, who is, I am told, now living in this town?"

"Well, I left her, that is true; I had enough of her. So would you, Mr. Bayliss, if you'd married Keziah Kislingbury. There, I defy any man, if he got the chance, not to desert Keziah, though she had her gifts—and wonderful they were. Perhaps I was a fool not to stick to them. But there, you see where the land lay. I thought, with my knowledge of metals, that I'd nothing to do but just to go to America and dig the gold in pailfuls. Now, no luck came of that three thousand pounds. Not a single cent did I net by it. It was payin' out and payin' out, like the sailors in a deep anchorage,

and no bottom after all. I went to Colorado, where the silver mines are ; no good. Then I went to Mexico prospecting ; no good again. Then I tried Chili ; no good there. And then I tried Australia. It took time ; but the money was going faster and faster. Then I tried the diamond fields. Well, then, Mr. Bayliss, I suppose you'll believe *me* "—he spoke as if he was an Evangelist at least—"when I tell you that the diamond fields is the cussedest plant out. There is certainly them as find the stones, but there's them as finds none. I was one of them as found none—not a stone, not a single precious stone, not a damned diamond did I hit upon. And all the money was gone—quite gone."

"And then?" Mr. Bayliss looked at his watch as a sign to his guest.

"And then? Ah! then I had a pretty free time for a bit among the Boers, as they call them. You see, the land is a dry land, and as there are no rivers to speak of, they get along with wells. Covered all over it is with a scrub; the farms dotted all about: here and there a house with a cattle kraal. What they want mostly is water. I took up the old trade, and went about with my divining rod. There were others in the same lay—there always is. Blest if I think an honest speculator can hit on the cleverest dodge, but somebody else is on it before him, and then envy and hatred and backbiting. Not one single lay is there in the whole wide world that an honest man can take up all by himself, and have a clear field and no favour." Mr. Bastable should have chosen literature. There, at least, he would have found an atmosphere where no man envies another of the same craft, where all alike unite in speaking well of their brothers, and where honest effort ever meets with honest appreciation. "A dozen of us, at least, up and down Orange River. None of them a patch on me: that was allowed. If any one did know where to lay his hand upon a well with the Patent Infallible Wonder-working Hazel Divining Wand, it was Benjamin Bastable. I made the fortune of a dozen of the crawling, lazy Dutchmen, who smoke all day long, and forget their benefactors; and no thanks—not a bit. Lord! when

I think of the things I have done for that colony, my mouth feels like a bit of blotting-paper."

"You will take something, Mr. Bastable?"

"Thank you, Mr. Bayliss. You always were a gentleman, though we had words about the Ravendale business. However, to give good drink a name, I'll say bitter beer for choice. It's scarce in the colonies, and an Englishman little thinks of the blessings he's got till he misses the blessings he's lost. A quart, if you don't mind, Mr. Bayliss."

The beer came, and Mr. Bastable, taking the jug in his hands, drained its contents at a single draught. "Good Lord! it's heavenly! I came home in a temperance ship: worked my passage—me that had gone out a saloon passenger and drank champagne with tip-top New York society. Why, I was nearly marr—Lord! I forgot."

"Go on, Mr. Bastable."

"I got home a week or so ago. Found my way here to look for you, and fell in with my wife. There's more misfortunes, sir. There's a double extra-distilled misfortune for you. They never come single. 'Bad luck,' as the hymn says; 'Bad luck is like the fleas in June. I never did them harm. They cannot come by ones or twos, but always comes in swarms.'"

"Go on, Mr. Bastable."

Mr. Bayliss's face was set, expectant of something; he knew what, but did not dare show any anxiety. "I met her, on my way here, yesterday afternoon; and it's all gone, Mr. Bayliss, it's all gone."

"What is all gone?"

"The power, sir, the beautiful power. It's all gone. She isn't afraid of me. I saw her across the road, and I came behind her for a bit, trying on the old dodges. That didn't fetch her. Then I walked up to her and took her by the arm. She started a bit. 'Benjamin!' she says. 'Benjamin it is,' I replied in a deep and solemn voice, such as I used to use. Then, if you'll believe *me*, sir, she began to laugh. 'What's this, Keziah?' I asked. 'It's so funny,' she says. 'Funny?' I asks. 'Funny,' she says. 'Why is it funny?' I asks. 'I



heard you behind,' she says, 'and I never thought about you a bit, and yet I knew, somehow, the step; and it's actually my Benjamin come back.' Then I ordered her to come with me and do my bidding. Devil a bit would she stir. 'It's all gone, Benjamin,' she said. 'The sperruts has left me for years and years. Even old Peter went at last: and he was like a burr for stickiness. As for Katey, she went off with somebody else, and I don't think Katey was a bit better than she ought to be. Not a sperrut left; not a rap in the house; not a voice in the night; no fingers about my throat; no footsteps on the stairs; no trances, and no clairvoyonging—and praise the Lord for all His mercies! For I'm never going to be a witch no more.' 'Keziah Bastable,' I said, 'you'll come to your lawful lord and master, and obey him as you promised in your wedding vows.' 'Drat the wedding vows,' she said, like a heathen. Why, the very Caffre women respect their wedding vows, or else their husbands let 'em have it with a stick; and very proper too. 'Drat 'em,' said Keziah. 'Keziah,' I said, 'are you mad?' 'Not at all,' she replied. 'I'm in my right senses. You deserted me for twelve long years, and left me all alone with the ghosts. Now, *do* you think, Benjamin Bastable, now I've a'most forgotten it all, and it's all forgiven up above, that I'm going to take up again with all the wicked courses? No; I'm not afraid of you—not a bit. I defy you. Do your worst. I won't come back to you. I won't go clairvoyonging for you. I won't help you to call up the sperruts, to go answering your foolish questions, when they ought to be saying their prayers and singing their hymns, and so keep out of trouble, poor things. I won't do it, Benjamin, and so I tell you,' and just then there came along the street—Mr. Bayliss, may I ask for another suck at that beer? Talking always makes me dry, and just now my throat—you'll believe *me*—is like a sponge in summer weather. Thank you, Mr Bayliss. Thank you, James. Don't pour it out, because the jug's a good jug for drinking out of. The best jugs I know are what the gins in Australia—the niggers' wives, you know—carry."

"Go on, Mr. Bastable."

"Ay, ay, give me time. Now I'll go on, Mr. Bayliss." The man hitched his chair closer and laid his face sideways, almost on a level with the table, so looking into the eyes of his entertainer, who never moved, but sat looking into space with white lips, and a face that had no expression whatever in it. "Listen, Mr. Bayliss; this concerns you. I've slept on it, and I thought I should do better to come straight to you this morning with it. Listen, now."

"I am listening."

"It was young Armstrong that came along the street with another gentleman, the boy who was my page when I was in the clairvoyancy line; the boy who was with Myles Cuolahan when the divining rod found the iron; the boy whose father owned all the land."

"Go on, Bastable."

"The other gentleman, when Keziah had told her story, took me by the arm, friendly like. 'Come with me,' he says, 'come with me, Mr. Bastable, and let us have a talk.' I went with him. We had a drain, or I did, because young Mr. Armstrong seems but a poor hand at the drink, and then we went to Mr. Clifton's office. He began to ask a lot of questions which did not seem to me to have much to do with my wife—when I came here, how long I stayed here, what I did here, and so on till I cut up rough. Then, said Jack—I mean young Armstrong, 'Show it him.' So they pulled out a paper and showed me my name at the bottom of it. 'Is that your signature?' asked the lawyer." He paused and took some more beer.

"Go on, Mr. Bastable."

"I made no answer. Mr. Bayliss, I have been a lawyer's clerk. I know a conveyance sharp enough when I see one. You know whether that conveyance that they had copied *ever came out of a lawyer's office or not*. You know whether that is *my signature or not*."

"You did not reply?"

"I did not. I said, 'Gentlemen, here's a plant upon innocence. I shouldn't have thought it of you, Mr. Armstrong—I shouldn't indeed. You want to trap me. You will find it

hard to trap me. Perhaps you'll give me time to answer that question, gentlemen. I've dodged the parairy dog on his native heath, and tackled the python in the Mexican jungle. I've likewise cheated the Chinaman and done the Caffre, but I never answered a question in a hurry yet that I did not repent at leisure, so I'll take a day or two, perhaps three, to think it over quietly and argue the matter out as between gentlemen.' So I had one more drain and came away."

"Go on, Mr. Bastable." His voice was husky now, and his eyes were dim with watching; for the worst blow of all was fallen, and his fate seemed to hang upon the weight of a feather.

"Now, Mr. Bayliss, let us be friendly, you and me. I'm as tight as wax if I'm paid. Let that be the groundwork of all. I'm the boy to hold my tongue, go away, keep dark, slip over to America, do anything, if I'm paid. How much?" Mr. Bayliss was silent. "I am not an expensive man. I want an annuity. It is nothing to you, a hundred or two out of your big income. Give me three hundred, say. Make arrangements to let me have it quarterly, and I'm the most silent dog in the world."

"How can I trust you?" asked Bayliss.

"Trust me? You can trust me, because I am on the point of starvation. If you do not give me a pound or two I shall have to go and beg of Keziah."

Bayliss put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a handful of gold and silver. "Take that to live with. Can you be silent another day?" he whispered eagerly.

"Of course I can."

"See, Bastable. You have all to gain—all to gain—by silence. I admit nothing. I say nothing. Only be silent for a single day, and you shall have your reward."

"Mr. Bayliss, I will. I give you my sacred word of honour, if you'll believe me, that I will say nothing."

"Come, then, to-morrow at eight—no, at nine—and you shall see me again. Go quietly to some hotel, or—better still, go out of the town—and—and—for God's sake, don't get drunk."



"Benjamin Bastable," said the hero, "never did get drunk but once in all his life. That was at Ballarat, when the miners were having an evening with swell's drink. They messed up curaçoa and gin and champagne and port and brandy. Lord! how drunk we were. Don't be afraid, Mr. Bayliss; there's no such thing as curaçoa and champagne in this miserable country, I believe. To-morrow at nine. And look here, sir," he clapped him on the back. To a man of fine susceptibilities it would have been an additional pang; to Paul Bayliss it brought comfort. "If that deed is the only thing, don't you be afraid. It's only me, and I'm like an owl for quietness."

He went away. Then Paul Bayliss wearily rose, walked feebly up and down, and then—went to bed, and fell sound asleep.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

POOR old Cardiff Jack was growing steadily weaker. He spent most of the day upon the sofa or in an easy chair wheeled to the fire. The boat he had rigged with so much care, the kite he had constructed, lay in his room unheeded. Sometimes he would read, sometimes he would sit and think, sometimes he would talk with Norah, but always with the perfect sweetness of manner that distinguished this remarkably well-bred boy. His affection for Norah exceeded all bounds. His eyes followed her about the room and rested upon her while she sat at work. She gave him advice about everything; to her he opened out his heart.

"Norah," he said one morning after a long nap by the fire, waking suddenly into liveliness, "when I think of what I am going to be, all my life, it seems as if there were some ugly dream in my head, which prevents my thinking at all."

"Never mind the dream, Arthur. And do not think too much about the future."

"But I must, you know. What is a boy to think of but the future? You don't really believe, dear Norah, that I am

going on all my life making boats and all that nonsense, do you?"

"Surely not, Arthur."

"I am going to Eton, where I shall study hard and become a great scholar; then I am going. . . . I do not know yet; my cousin Lucy—where is cousin Lucy? I thought I saw her just now, when I was asleep." He closed his eyes again, as he always did when something jarred between his real and imaginary life. When he awoke again, it was in a more despondent mood. He was thinking of his weakness and his ailments. "What is it, Norah?" he murmured. "If I run about like other boys, I get tired at once. I can't jump as I used to do. I am always having to sit down. And then I've got a pain whenever I move my left arm, which won't go away. What does it mean?" Norah hesitated.

"Do not be afraid, Norah," said the boy. "If it is anything unpleasant to tell me, let me know it all the same. You know I shall be a man some day, and must be brave."

"There are some boys, Arthur, who never become men."

"Do you mean, Norah, that they are foolish boys all their lives?"

"No, Arthur. I mean—— My poor boy, are you quite brave?"

"I see, Norah," he said, shaking his white locks, while a tear started to his eye. "You mean that there are some boys who . . . die." Norah was silent.

"Die," he went on, "leave all the bright world and—and—cousin Lucy. . . . Why does not my cousin come to me? I have not seen her all day. Die—and be put in a black coffin, and be carried to the family vault in a hearse. Norah, you don't think, really and truly think, that I am going to die?"

"Death, Arthur, has nothing to do with funerals. If you die, think of what is before you. You will change this world for a better. Ah, Arthur, you think that everything is bright and happy. My poor boy, you will escape the temptation of life; you will avoid the sin and wretchedness of the world. It is better so, much better so."

"And Lucy?"

"Hush! my dear. You have forgotten. You have had a long illness, and will never be quite well again. Try to remember that Lucy has gone before, and that you will see her again in this new world where you are going. Would you know Lucy again?"

"Know cousin Lucy? Why, Norah, you must be silly to ask such a question. Know Lucy, indeed!"

"Tell me what she was like, dear Arthur."

He laughed outright, forgetting for the moment about his approaching death and the glorious world, the reward of innocence which lay beyond.

"Lucy is a year and a half younger than I am. Lucy is not really my cousin, but we always call her cousin; she has got brown eyes, your shaped eyes, Norah, and such a lot of brown curls, the same colour. Everybody says she is the prettiest girl in the world; and when we grow up we are going to marry. That is all arranged."

"But, Arthur, you can never marry Lucy now. She is gone before, you remember."

"I forgot—I must have been ill. Where is she gone?"

"Gone into the silent land, Arthur. Gone to heaven, where you are going soon."

"You think I shall go there soon? Norah, God is very good, is He not? and I do try to be good. I always try. Sometimes I have said wicked things—once I told a lie. Do you think God will forgive me?"

"God forgives every one. But, Arthur, you know you have been ill; you may have forgotten some of your worst sins. Tell me, my dear, do you remember nothing but what you have told me?"

"Nothing, Norah. Why should I hide anything from you?"

"Then, Arthur, when you pray, ask God to forgive you all those sins which you may have forgotten, but which you would repent of if you could remember. Say that now, Arthur, while you think of it, else it may go out of your head."

He put up his trembling hands and repeated, "Lord, for-



give me all the sins that I have forgotten." Then he smiled. "It is all very well, Norah, but I have forgotten nothing."

The past was clean gone, then. Norah sat down on a stool by the fire, and taking his hand in hers, fondled it, while she tried to touch his memory in some point at least. It seemed to her so dreadful that the dying man should go out of the world in a dream, ignorant of the dreadful past which lay between his sunny youth and his bewildered age. At tea-time, Norah observed him pondering apparently over some mighty problem, with knitted brows.

"Norah," he said at last, "I have been thinking of what you said yesterday—about self-denial. Please, no sugar in my tea."

"Why not, Arthur?"

"Because," setting his lips hard, "because sugar is one of the pleasures of life, and I must try to learn to forego them all, if necessary."

He drank his tea unsweetened, and then began to enlarge on the beauties of self-sacrifice. The boy was, if anything, growing younger, not older. But his time for growing at all was short. He caught a bad cold trying to swim his new boat in the water butt, and was put to bed, and nursed by Norah. Doctors came to see the poor boy thus prematurely threatened, and shook their learned heads. They sent him bottles, and the child took them meekly when Norah persuaded him, making no lamentations over the necessity, but patiently lying in his bed, reading when he was strong enough some pious picture-book which Norah got for him; or, he would talk hopefully of the day when he should be quite well again. A most gentle and pure-hearted boy always.

Accustomed as Norah was to the strange contrast between the boyish ways and the venerable grey hair, she sometimes felt giddy, as if the room were going round, as the old man poured out his childish prattle.

As the autumn deepened into winter his weakness increased upon him. Then came a time when he no longer rose from his bed at all, and Norah had to nurse him like the sick child that he was. But he never lost his hopefulness and buoyancy

of spirit. Moreover, he had no disease, only a general break up of the great constitution he had ruined by so many excesses;—and through it all the mirth and glee of the boy, which made the sick-room of poor old Cardiff Jack a sweet and pleasant place to go to. Myles and Jack sat with him sometimes, but chiefly it was Norah who, when the old man was laid on his sofa by the fire, brought her work and talked to him of heaven, and God's goodness, and all holy things, so that the youthful mind of her patient was filled with all manner of pleasant visions.

One night he had a bad dream. Norah heard him cry for help, and sprang from her bed, thinking of that other night, only a few months before, when she had battled with the half-maddened old drunkard, now so strangely changed. His face was flushed, and a look of terror was in his eye.

"Norah," he moaned, catching her hand, "do not leave me, dear Norah, not till I have gone to sleep again. I have had a dreadful dream. I think it must be real. See, Norah, I thought I broke Lucy's heart, and killed my own mother with some disgrace that came upon me. Norah, I did not cry, or say a single word. I only laughed. Think of it. I dreamed that I had ruined and killed my mother, my dear mother who loves me so. Why does she not come to see me now I am ill and dying? And in my dream I saw Lucy. She was grown up, and she said to me: 'I have loved you always, Arthur, in spite of your wicked selfishness, and your disgrace. I love you still. Let me, now that you have no friends left, be your friend still. Let me be your wife, Arthur, if by that I can rescue you from yourself. Take me, marry me, if you like, if only that can help to save you.' Norah, I promised her that I would marry her; and I only took her money and became worse than ever. It is all a dreadful dream. I try to forget it, but I cannot. I had letters from poor Lucy, such kind and loving letters, so full of forgiveness, and I used them all to get more money out of her. Always more money; always more wickedness. And one day another letter came. It told me that Lucy was dead, with a prayer for me; and she sent me a last message that

she would give me more money ; but I had taken it all, taken it all, Norah. Could you believe it ? And what do you think I did ? I went away and got drunk. Oh ! what a dreadful dream. Why does not Lucy come to me ? Oh, bring me Lucy, Norah."

The girl soothed him as much as she could, and presently he fell into a restless slumber. Some chord of his memory had been touched, and the spectres of the past were risen to torment him once more.

He died on Christmas Day—that day when St. Peter leaves the gates open, so that all who die on the blessed birthday may enter freely at the golden portals of heaven. He was very weak in the morning, and his mind wandered strangely, but always within the narrow limits of his delusion. He was sailing a boat on the river ; he was fishing with cousin Lucy ; he was running races round the garden with her ; he was flying a kite, with Lucy to help tie on the tail ; he was telling her stories ; he was singing hymns with her. It was pitiful to hear the old man's quavering voice singing tremulously the old hymns that were in fashion fifty years ago and more, hymns of sadness and despondency—chiefly on the old Wesleyan pattern—or, at best, expressive of the vanity of this world, and the subdued happiness of the next—hymns with none of the unreal rapture which marks the modern utterances. Norah watched him as the hours of morning passed slowly away. There came a change about noon, a sudden and awful change, for, as if with a single stroke, the old man's face was transformed. Yes, he was no longer a boy ; the trustful light of innocence and youth faded instantaneously from his eyes ; the sunshine left his face ; his forehead clouded over ; his cheeks were wreathed with a thousand seams and wrinkles ; what had been dimples showed like deep pits of temptation ; his lips seemed to swell and grow purple ; his chin drooped ; his nose swelled and reddened. Arthur Dimsdale was dead, and only Cardiff Jack remained. Norah, horror-struck, rushed to the bell. The man awoke and sat up in bed. As Jack's footstep was heard on the stairs he broke into a soliloquy on the badness of the times. If we



suppress all the ejaculations but the first, it is in deference to popular opinion, and in violence to our veneration for truth, because the speech was interlarded with oaths.

"Damn you and smite you!" he began. The girl shrank back appalled. "Why am I lying here like a useless log when there's work to be done, and money to be got for the asking—only for the asking? Ho! ho! Put Cardiff Jack on the right scent, and trust to him to pull you through. Times bad, mate? They never were anything but bad to a poor liver-coloured pitiful area sneak like you, Times never are bad for Cardiff Jack. When he isn't up to one dodge he is up to another. You make no bleeding error. Put me down on Newmarket Heath to-morrow, and see what I'll bring you in the evening. Ask Poll. Poll knows what I did at Epsom last week. General Duckett was there with six of his best boys; Liverpool Joe was there with his pardner; Flash Charley was there with his bank notes fluttering about like the leaves of the blessed trees, and Cardiff Jack was there. Ask Poll who did the best. Liverpool Joe's in quod, he is, and his pardner too. Bah!—what's the thimble-trick? Hanky-panky's no good; fortune-telling's no good; as for nabbing a stray wive—that was all General Duckett done—and one of his boys caught in the very act, with the wive in his hand and the pocket-book in his blessed little pocket, and as good as twenty pounds a year lost to the poor old General for ever, because the young 'un 'll be sent to a Reformatory. And Flash Charley ducked for a welsher, and might have been killed only that the bobbies interfered. That's a good day's work for them all, ain't it? Ask Poll what I did. Ask her, I tell you. Lord! how neat and quiet I turned out, and how the bets came in—and how I pocketed the swag in the little tent, and how we bolted, Poll and me, and changed our rig, so that the devil himself wouldn't know his own again. Here's luck, boys! Drink to the health of Cardiff Jack. Cardiff Jack's the King. He's the Prince of begging-letter writers. He's the flash boy of all the gentlemen of the road. If you want a plant, come to Cardiff Jack, and pay him, and he'll put you

up to it. Come to . . . come to". . . Here he paused and trembled and turned white, when he saw Jack come into the room.

"I know you," he said. "Why do you come here? Let me go. Let me get up and go away, I say. Why am I kept prisoner . . . prisoner? What am I a prisoner for? No one saw me do it. I won't confess. Stay," he looked round the room bewildered. "There's nobody here except you, and you're dead, because I murdered you long ago when you were a little boy, a pretty little devil of a little boy; and this girl here, she's nobody. She's always here, I think. I will confess that I drowned you—no one knows anything. Go tell them all if you like. There's no proof. Cardiff Jack's my name, tell them. Bring the bobbies—take me to the Beak. Prove it—if you can. Prove it! Prove it! Prove it!" His voice rose to a shriek as he fell back exhausted.

"O Jack!" murmured Norah. "What are we to do?"

"Nothing. Nothing can be done. The end is very near, Norah."

She threw herself by the bedside, and prayed aloud.

"Where is the body? Ho! ho! Down at the bottom of the deep, deep sea. Look for it there. Where are the eyes who saw me do it? Bring them here."

"They are here," said Jack, bending over him. "They are here. Look in them. Do you remember the eyes that looked in yours for a gleam of pity and found none?"

"Ay . . ." he moaned. "They are the eyes. I know them; I remember them."

"You are dying. You will be with God in a very short time. I forgive you: ask God to forgive you too."

He put his hands out before him in a wild and piteous way, and his eyes stared vacantly as he listened to the words that seemed to come to him from the grave, the boundless grave of the ocean where he thought the murdered boy was lying. "What am I to do? Where am I to go? They are all before me. My mother is here—and Lucy—Lucy."

"They have all forgiven you . . . indeed, indeed, they have," said Norah. "Only ask God to forgive you."

He shook his head. He seemed half to understand. "No use," he said, "no use;—ah!" and fell back as if smitten with some sudden blow.

They thought he was dead. But it was not so. The pulse beat feebly, and the breathing came slowly, and an hour passed by. As they watched, the lines faded out of the face again, and he became, save for the closed eyes, a boy once more.

"It is always so," said Jack. "He will die peacefully, and you will see him again with his childish smile."

But he awoke again. And Cardiff Jack was gone for ever. "Norah," Arthur murmured, "I am dying. Dear Norah, I have been a terrible trouble to you. Jack, we shall never sail our boat together, now. I thought it would be hard to die so young. But it isn't, Norah, it isn't. I am going to God. There I shall find my cousin Lucy. You told me, I remember, that I should meet her there. Something has gone wrong with me, and I do not recollect when she died, or how I came here. But never mind that now. Norah . . . will it hurt to die?"

"No, dear Arthur. No. Only say your prayers first. Say what I told you."

"Yes, Norah. God, forgive me all the sins I remember, and all the sins I have forgotten, for the sake of Jesus." Then his head dropped back. "Kiss me, Norah," he said. "I don't know how you came to me; but I love you almost as well as cousin Lucy. Kiss me, dear. . . . It isn't hard to die . . . not hard at all . . . and . . . and" . . . he lifted his head . . . "cousin Lucy—dear Lucy, wait one moment and I will go with you, too, to play in the garden." They were the last words of Cardiff Jack!



## CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN Bastable went away, Paul Bayliss took to his bed and stayed there. The tumult of his mind made his limbs weary and his eyes heavy. He dragged himself to his bedroom, laid himself with a sigh on the bed, and presently fell into a sleep of unconsciousness, that was not sleep, but nervous exhaustion. When he awoke it was twelve o'clock and his head was on fire. He moaned in his pain; he rolled himself from side to side in an agony of expectation that was worse than any bodily pain. Twelve o'clock. It was time that Armstrong should come. Twelve o'clock! Why—even now they might be coming with a warrant to arrest him. But no. Bastable would hold his tongue for his own sake. Even now, though, without Bastable's evidence they might on suspicion summon him before a magistrate, and so disgrace him for ever. It was impossible to rest still with such a thought. He threw the covering from him, and sprang upon the floor. He stood there; he heard voices outside, and a trampling of feet in the passage below. Could it be the constables with the warrant? His teeth chattered, his helpless hands hung at his side, his forehead was wet with the sweat of terror, his pale cheeks grew whiter than the pallor of death, and as his limbs huddled together he fell senseless upon the floor.

But it was no officer with a warrant; it was only Jack Armstrong himself, brought to the rich man's room by his footman. The man knocked. As no answer came, he knocked again, and yet a third time. Then he opened the door, and timidly peeped in. His master lay in a heap by the bedside, and from his forehead was oozing the thick red blood. The servant called Armstrong, and without a word the two raised the heavy man from the floor and laid him on the bed. Jack brought water and washed his forehead.

"He has had a fit," he said. "Don't make a fuss, don't tell Miss Ella. See, he knocked his head against this corner,

and cut himself. But that is nothing. You had better fetch a doctor quietly."

"No, no doctor," murmured Bayliss, who opened his eyes and roused himself with a great effort. "No doctor—not yet. Is that you, Armstrong? Go away, James, and keep a quiet tongue. Where am I? Ah! I remember. Did I fall out of bed?"

"Don't talk, Mr. Bayliss," said Jack. "You have had a faintness."

"Give me some water. So—I am better already. Lift my head higher—another pillow. That is right. Now I can talk. Sit down, Armstrong, and let us talk—let us talk—not talk?—why, what do I want you to come here for?" He spoke hurriedly, and looked about the room, the ceiling, everywhere, except in Jack's face.

The servant went out and shut the door. Then Paul Bayliss began again—"Jack, do you know what day this is? It is the day before Christmas. No—I am not wandering: my mind is clear: and I'm not going to talk a lot of blessed rubbish about the happy Christmas season, because that's humbug. It's a time when the hands get drunk, that's what it is, and a beast of a time, too. But—oh! Jack, I am very ill—I am so ill that I cannot be worse. I am dying, Jack, I am dying."

"Nonsense, Mr. Bayliss. You will very soon get over this."

"Never—never! What was I going to say?"

"You were talking about Christmas, Mr. Bayliss. Will you have a little more water?"

The penitent sinner felt his brain wandering a little, but he made a mighty effort and recovered himself. "It's the fit, and—and—everything. What was I going to say to you? I remember. To-night will be Christmas Eve. A week after this night, three and twenty years ago, Jack Armstrong, your father died. He was drinking with me in the evening: he went away and drank more. Then . . . . you know the rest. I am not guilty of his death, Jack."

"He left a single field, Mr. Bayliss, the last remnant of the Armstrong estate."

"Last night, Jack, I saw him again. He was sitting where you are. He looked the same as he did in life, and he reproached me. And to-night he will come again. I know he will come again and look at me as he did last night. And what am I to say to him?"

"If I thought he would come," said Jack irreverently, "I would sit up with you, in order to ask him one question. I should ask him how you got the title-deeds of his estate."

This was hardly the way to meet the tragedy of the situation, but Jack was in an angry mood. He was certain that Bayliss had forged the deed; and he knew that Bastable had been with him; also, it was against the lawyer's advice that he acceded to Paul's letter, and came to see him at all. But Bayliss had worked himself into such an agony of terror, that he thought nothing of Jack's tone, and went on with the uneven current of his own ideas.

"I know he will come again to-night. And he was right, Jack, he was right. I feel it now—now that I am dying. He was quite right. The son of my old partner, the man to whom I owed my start in life, made with borrowed money. I ought to have offered you what you asked. Yes, Jack, now that I am ill—and I think that I shall never get better, I have sent for you to offer you a partnership in the great house of Bayliss, ironmaster—not Bayliss and Company. Plain Paul Bayliss. For your sake, my boy, we will make it Bayliss and Armstrong."

"Mr. Bayliss, I want my own."

"It isn't a mere partnership in the profits of your own discovery, Jack, son of my oldest and best friend, that I offer. It is a full half partnership in the great works of Bayliss, ironmaster. That is due to you; I don't grudge anything, Jack, to the son of my old partner. Share and share alike it shall be. What I make, you shall divide."

"Mr. Bayliss, I want my own."

"When you came to me with that Irish fellow, what did I do? I took you in without a premium. I told them to teach you all there was to be learned. I made a man of you. All you know you have learned from me—all you ever



taught yourself was in my works. Confess, Jack, is it not so?"

"Mr. Bayliss, I want my own."

"It will be something to-night, when your poor dead father comes to my bedside, to say to him, 'Johnny, I have done what I could. I taught your boy; I gave employment to the man who brought him up: and now, when the boy has become a man, and has learned all he can learn, I make him my partner—half and half—and I leave him to manage the business.' That will be something to say. That will lay the unquiet spirit of Johnny Armstrong."

Jack Armstrong was startled. Was the man shamming? It would have seemed so, but for the frightful change that twenty-four hours had brought about. The full bright eye rolling about in wildness, with the red and heavy eyelids, the flabby cheeks, the fit that he had witnessed, all told Jack that the man was not shamming. Anything but shamming; and the young man's heart was touched at the sight of his misery. "You forget, Mr. Bayliss," he said, with the confusion that generally seizes virtue when her enemy meets her in some unexpected manner, "you forget that we have copied your deeds of conveyance, and stopped them at the Bank. The man Bastable has returned. You have seen him."

"Ay, ay; all that is nothing. Bastable be damned! It depends on you, Jack—on you. Take my offer—take it. If I live you will be master, if I die you will not repent having smoothed the last hours of a dying man—perhaps a sinful man."

The young man was silent. What could he say? He came there full of the most uncompromising resolutions. He was not to be coaxed or wheedled; he was not to sacrifice one single point of his claims. And yet here was the man who had done him this wrong, the man whom he had considered the most masterful of all men, lying prostrate and helpless at his feet, craving as a boon everything, save the exposure and disgrace that he was fearing.

"Jack Armstrong," continued Bayliss, "don't be cruel and vindictive. As for your father, he always forgave his

enemies. If you kicked him, he would kick you back and think no more of it. If I refused you a partnership, you have brought me to the brink of death, and ought to be satisfied. Take it now, and let us be friends."

"But that does not give me what I demand," said Jack. "I want my estate."

"Is that all? Take the estate; take every rod of land in my possession that Johnny Armstrong once owned. It will only be part of the partnership."

Jack began to waver. Why should he be hard upon this poor frightened creature, brought to bay in a corner, and anxious only to make terms? "Tell me about that conveyance," he said.

"What conveyance? I know nothing about any conveyance."

"Then I know nothing about any partnership. Listen, Mr. Bayliss. I came here resolved to fight you, whatever might happen. You offer terms. But that will not do. Before I think of terms I must know the truth. Tell me all the truth."

Paul Bayliss turned his face from him, and hid it with the pillow. "The truth—the truth. If I tell you the truth. What if I do not?"

"Then we will prove it, Mr. Bayliss. The deed on which you raised the money is a forgery. We will prove it with you, not in the witness-box, but in the dock. King of Esbrough you called yourself two days ago; the meanest creature in the town will pity you when we have concluded our case."

"I can die," he moaned, in the recesses of the feathers. "I can die. It is easy to stop it all with a pistol."

"No; you only perpetuate your disgrace, because we proceed all the same, and your name will suffer instead of yourself."

"Jack Armstrong, you are young; you are strong; you are clever; you are fortunate." He sat up in bed now, and clutched the other by the wrist. "You think that nothing will ever make you commit a dishonourable thing. Wait, lad,

wait. When you have been toiling for twenty years in vain ; when every day plunged you deeper in the mire ; and when, after all your troubles, a way of safety shows, with wealth and honour beyond, don't think that you, more than other people, will avoid the temptation. God ! how poor I was. God ! how I dreaded to go home when my wife sat waiting to nag and gird at me, and my sister to ask me what I had done with all her money—seven hundred pounds it was—and no one to welcome me except my little girl, my dear little Ella. Did I stick at doing what I did ? No, Jack, no ; and if it were to be done again, I would do it over again. That deed, which I forged—yes, forged ; there's nobody here to take the words down—forged, Jack Armstrong, is the word—that deed—give me a little more water. My head is clear again after the fit, and I know what I am saying. That deed started the great Esbrough works ; on the strength of that deed I took the Ravendale mines ; on the strength of that deed I made Perrymont wake up and work the vein on his own property ; on that deed rests the fortunes of all this great place. Where there were fields then, there are terraces and villas ; where there were paupers, are wealthy families. Where there was misery, is comfort. What did it ? That deed did it. Who forged the deed ? I, Paul Bayliss, I forged the deed—with this right hand." The confession seemed to relieve him, and his voice grew firmer and steadier.

"But that deed destroyed my fortune while it made yours."

"You knew nothing. Now I offer you a half of what I am making out of that desperate venture."

"Mr. Bayliss, you ask me to compound a felony."

"I do nothing of the sort," replied the casuist eagerly. "All I say is this : Bring me the copy you have made of the deed ; remove the prohibition on Stewart at the Bank ; forget all I have said, and you shall not only be partner, but also sole manager of the great Esbrough works. I will retire : I am growing old. I shall leave everything to you. Refuse, and you can go your own way. You will not be able to prove your case : Bastable and I can square it. There is



nobody else to help you; and though you bring discomfort and suspicion upon me, and create a scandal that will cling for the rest of my days, you will be left alone in the world." All this seemed very true, and Jack wavered. "I have told you all, Jack Armstrong, because I know you to be a man of honour. You will not go away to Clifton and tell him what I have confessed to you. You will not act upon words, wrung from me on a bed of sickness. No one will know, no one except you and me. And as for Bastable, if he dares to speak, I will bring him up for defamation, by Gad! for I shall destroy the infernal deed at once." The stunning effect of the fit was gone off by this time, and the man, though weak in body, was clear and bright in mind. "They all know," he went on, "how fond I have been of you. There was that speech I made the hands after Norah Cuolahan saved you from them. . . . You have been often at my house. . . . I am a friend of Mr. Fortescue's. . . . You have walked about with my daughter. . . . No one can say but what I've treated you as my own son. There will be nothing strange. Bayliss and Armstrong; it used to be Armstrong and Bayliss, in the old days. . . . We will even make it Armstrong and Bayliss again."

"No . . . no" . . . said Jack, touched by this concession more than by any other.

"And . . . and . . . one thing more, Jack. I've kept it for the last, my boy. I've got a daughter. What you do to me, you do to her. If you disgrace me, you disgrace her. Think of the pleasant evenings you have spent, Norah Cuolahan and you, with her, made pleasant by her. She has been brought up in innocence of all this."

Then there was silence. At last Jack spoke again: "I accept, Mr. Bayliss. You shall, with as little delay as possible, sign a deed of partnership. I will take all the business that comes from the Esbrough estate—properly my estate; you shall have all that comes from the Ravendale farmed estates; and I shall be the manager of all. Do you accept?"

"I accept, Jack; I accept."

"Do not think that I want to press you. You will give me the benefit of your experience; you will gradually come less often to the works."

"What security can I give you, Jack, that I will keep my promise?"

"None," said Armstrong loftily. "I want nothing but your word."

"You shall have it," returned Bayliss. "If you will give me, first, the assurance of your forgiveness."

Jack, with some hesitation, and much blushing, gave him his hand. It was a strange and a wonderful thing, after looking on this man for so long as a Colossus of strength, to find that he was after all only an idol whose feet are of clay.

"If you want the deeds," he said sheepishly, "I will bring them to you, copy and original as well. Write me a note for the manager of the Bank. Clifton will get the prohibition removed at once. It is now half-past twelve. Try and sleep if you can."

"Promise me again that not a word of this shall pass your lips. I know your honour. Mr. Fortescue has told me that he made you, above all, a truthful boy. Promise me."

"I promise, Mr. Bayliss. Not one word shall pass my lips, or the lips of Clifton."

He left him. And when he left the heart of the man was uplifted. He thought nothing of the shame and disgrace of his confession—that was like a bitter pill that had to be swallowed and was now done—it was characteristic of him that the fact of other men, counting Bastable, knowing that he was a forger and a common cheat, oppressed him with no trouble at all. Two would not speak, and the third was powerless. He was safe—that was all; for twelve long years there had been weighing upon him, sometimes with a might almost too heavy to bear, the danger that he was in. It was well to argue as he did that there was no danger. He knew there was peril in every hour, peril at every turn that Armstrong might take, peril from every man who had known his father. And yet, though he had long intended to remove

the deeds from the custody of the Bank, deeds as damnatory should they be discovered as any clause in the Creed of St. Athanasius, he had never done so. For the resolution to do so had been generally taken in the dead of night, when the conscience is most reproachful, and had been forgotten in the sunshine of the day, when the man is strongest and his nerves the least shaky.

Now it was all over. There would be no more trembling at shadows; no more dread of an awful future; no more horrible anticipations of collapse and shameful exposure; no more dreams of ten years long, to be spent in a narrow white-washed cell. He thought over this and was thankful. His head was still a little confused with his fall, and with the horror of the night he had passed; but he fell back on the pillow and slept the sleep of the righteous, or at least of the forgiven. Three hours later Jack returned, bearing with him the precious documents. Mr. Bayliss was still sleeping. His face had not upon it the sweet boyish innocence that might be boasted by poor dying Cardiff Jack; you see he had not gone so far in wickedness, and, therefore, the reaction was not so strong; but there shone from his countenance a wonderful serenity, which bespoke the peace of the inner man. Armstrong laughed to himself when he saw it. Then he gently roused the sleeper.

"I have brought you the deeds, Mr. Bayliss."

He awoke in a moment and clutched them eagerly. Yes, they were all there, and among them the . . . the fictitious deed, written in his own handwriting, attesting signatures and all, and the copy taken by Mr. Clifton, the lawyer. These two he selected from the rest, and, sitting up in bed, tore into the smallest shreds.

"You are sure, Jack," he whispered, "you are sure . . . you swear to me that there are no other copies?"

"I am quite sure that there are no other copies."

"Put them all into the fire for me—stay, no, I will burn them myself. . . . Jack, I feel better already. Tell all the world, if you like, that we are partners from the New Year; you the working partner, I the sleeping. You shall find that



I keep my word. Some men, Jack Armstrong, might round on you, and now that all proofs are destroyed"—

"All proofs are not destroyed."

"Eh? eh? How?"

"At least, we could get the affidavits of Stewart the Bank manager, and of Clifton—and myself—and Bastable. There, Mr. Bayliss, don't be alarmed, we shall have no need of affidavits."

"Not the least, not the least," he replied briskly. "And now, Jack, hear me: I feel better already. I will get up and eat something. My dear boy, my dear boy, I am happier at this moment than ever I have been before. To think that this heap of paper before me, which gave me such a devil of a bit of trouble, was the real means of working your fortune"—

"As well as your own, Mr. Bayliss."

"As well as my own," he rejoined cheerfully. "Why, without it, where should we have been? Where would Esbrough be, now? Where would you be? My dear Jack, son of my best friend, poor Johnny Armstrong, it was a PROVIDENTIAL act, quite Providential. It has made us all rich. Lord! Lord! as the poet says, this deed blessed him that borrowed, as well as the other man who lent. And yet, Jack, the world would find fault with us."

"With you."

"With me. So be it. Between ourselves, Jack, I think that the world would call it ugly names. All the same, if the world saw its way to making a fortune by imitating a deed, and never get punished for it, the world would go and do it. Never doubt that." He was a little light-headed, and talked fast.

"I do not, sir," said Jack, rather sadly.

"To-morrow is Christmas day. Let me see you the day after. You shall send Clifton to draw our deeds of partnership. Now, Jack, one stipulation, if I may make it. Your own terms, but not Clifton's. Good-bye, my dear, dear boy. I feel as if I was your second father."

Jack left him. Immediately he was gone Paul Bayliss got

out of bed. His legs were still shaky after his fall, and his head queer, but it was with something like youthful vigour that he performed, humming a cheerful air, a fandango or *pas seul* before his cheval glass. A long night shirt reaching to the ankles, and somewhat plentifully besprinkled with blood about the shoulder; a face still pale, a forehead with an open wound upon it. Knees that trembled exceedingly, and fingers that refused to crack in time with the melody, though they went through the motion of cracking—these things lent to the dance a grace and charm quite peculiar. “Paul,” the dancer exclaimed in a rapture, falling back exhausted on the bed, “you are a free man at last. But you’ve had a narrow escape, old boy; and what with your cursed fit, and your almighty funk, it’s just as well you had a boy instead of a man to deal with. Why, even that rascal Bastable would have made better terms. He might have taken all the past, and he has taken only half the future.”

It so happened that James the footman, anxious about his master’s welfare, was hovering about the passage outside the bedroom door. Hearing a noise within, he rapped. Receiving no answer, he opened the door softly. To his amazement, Mr. Bayliss, before the cheval glass and in his night shirt, was dancing an elephantine break-down. James closed the door noiselessly. Then he crept downstairs to the kitchen with awe-struck countenance, and sank breathless into a chair.

“Soosan,” he said, “a glass of beer if you can, and quick, I feel that low. I’ve seen a dreadful sight!” They brought him the consoler. “Master,” he said, “have gone off his chump—that’s all,” he added, with the calmness of despair; “that’s all;—off his chump. Don’t ask me more. We shall all of us lose our situations.”

In the midst of the consternation caused by this announcement the master’s bell rang.

“No,” said James, “not if I know it—not alone.”

“Why,” said the under-gardener, a youth of seventeen, but of robust habit, “you aren’t afraid, James, sure?”

“Not alone,” said James.

"Then I'll go with you," said the boy, arming himself with the poker, which he dropped down his back, in readiness. Mr. Bayliss was dressing, and whistling at the same time in a cheerful manner.

"James, . . . you did not tell Miss Ella about my accident?"

"No, sir," said James, listening for the following steps of the assistant-gardener, who was making ready with the poker. "No, sir. Mr. Armstrong told me not, sir."

"Mr. Armstrong was quite right. Now, ask Miss Ella to give me an early dinner, anything, and as soon as the cook can send it up. I feel better, James, but I haven't eaten anything to-day, and I am hungry. Tol de rol lol. And, James . . . James . . . tol de rol lol . . . tell the butler that I think I shall be better without port to-day. Let him give me a bottle of Piper. Très-sec, James; he may also send up a pint of Roederer for Miss Ella. Tol de rol lol."

At dinner he was full of talk—talked, indeed, too fast—and was kind and affectionate to Ella. After dinner came the Christmas waits. He listened with a religious rapture, which his daughter had never before noticed in him, while the boys and men chanted their noels and their hymns.

"A season of loving-kindness, Ella," he said. "'God rest you, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay, . . . nothing you dismay.' . . . Good tidings indeed, and worthy of Christmas eve. A time of general rejoicing. I wish I felt strong enough for a bottle of port. Send out the waits something to drink, and some money, my dear. 'God rest you, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay.' What a beautiful time Christmas is! I feel, Ella, as if I never properly appreciated Christmas before. A time of great thankfulness. I shall go to church to-morrow, my dear, and I think I shall stay sacrament. I believe they have it on Christmas day. 'God rest you, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay.'"



## CHAPTER XXV.

"CHILDREN," said Myles, "half our time is made up of forgivin' little wrongs. Why not forgive the big ones as well? I knew Paul Bayliss well in the old days—no one better. He was a good-hearted fellow, and just because he was so poor, he lost his courage. There's nothing tries a man like misery, except riches. Paul Bayliss has had both. He was first poor and then rich. Let Jack take his own again, even if it is not in the way that he would best like. It isn't like a good honest fight at the fair, where a man or two is kilt and it's all over. This is a different kind of fight, and I don't understand it. But that's the girl, the purty creature, Norah; you couldn't turn against the blue-eyed beauty that's so often put her arms round your neck and kissed you so beautiful."

"No, father," said Norah, "I forgot Ella. I was thinking only about Jack and what he should do. Only, if there was no Ella, I should have liked Jack to step into his own, and for all the world to know that he was come to his own again."

"Let things be thus," said Myles. "And now, children both, we must forget that we know anything against Paul Bayliss at all, at all. Whatever he says, or does, Norah, never let him know that Jack has told us a single word. I've known men trade in a secret. I've known them sell their silence a hundred times over. Our Cardiff Jack—poor fellow!—once lived a couple of years on a secret, till the man it belonged to could bear it no longer, and blew out his own brains to get quit. Let us hold our tongues. And now, Norah, alaunah, sing us a Christmas hymn before we have our tea."

In the evening Jack went to see Clifton, while Myles sat reading the Bible. This evening he found himself among the minor prophets, and read on, chapter after chapter, in a fine frame of religious bewilderment. "'Tis a blessed thing, Norah," he said, looking up, "being a Prodesdan. If I'd

been a Catholic I should never have opened the book at all; and it's great readin', if you only knew what it meant."

"What book are you reading, father?"

"Sure it's the Bible, asthore. Listen now, 'Woe unto you, Moab!' Who was Moab, I wondher? They were a terrible pair, Norah darlin', they two—Moab and Edom."

"Let me find you a place you will like better, dear father."

"No, thank you, my dear," he returned. "I like it all alike; and I think I've read enough for one day." Here there was a knock at the door. It was Keziah Bastable, breathless and excited. Norah went out to see her.

"Miss Norah, let me speak to you a moment. Come here—to the door. O Miss Norah!" she whispered, "Jenny's going on like a mad woman. She's got a knife, and she swears she will have Jack Armstrong's blood, and she's waiting on the door-steps for him, because she saw him go out. What shall I do, Miss Norah?" Norah hesitated. "She says she'll kill him, and I can't keep her quiet."

"I will go over," said Norah, after a moment.

"You can't go, my dear young lady. When Jenny's took too much, Jenny's more rampagious than words can tell. I can manage her most times, but I can't manage her then. No one can."

"I am not afraid of her," said Norah, drawing herself up. "Do you think she will kill me?" The tall young Irish girl, fearless, and as strong as if she had been brought up in the wilds of Connemara, looked down in the face of her visitor with flashing eyes.

"I think you are afraid of nothing, Miss Norah," said Mrs. Bastable. "Stay, there's one thing—I've told you most things, but I haven't told you all. If the worst comes to the worst, tell her that . . ." here she dropped her voice to a whisper, "And that you know it."

Norah heard and flushed; then a look of proud contempt fell upon her cheeks. "And she dared . . . she dared . . ."

"Jack didn't know, my dear."

Norah crossed the road. Mrs. Bastable went to find Myles.

"Come out, Mr. Cuolahan," she said. "Come out and

watch, or there may be mischief. Your daughter's gone to see Mrs. Merrion."

"Norah gone to . . ."

"Yes, and you must come too, or there may be murder done. Come quietly."

The front door at Laburnum Cottage was wide open, and they stole softly together up the steps, and stood outside the doors of Mrs. Merrion's drawing-room, where they heard the voices of Norah and the fair chatelaine—the one firm, clear, and steady; the other rising and falling like the unquiet breeze of a wild October day. Mrs. Merrion was standing on the highest door-step, looking down the road for the figure of the man she proposed to kill. The winter wind blew her long yellow tresses from her head, and as it was impossible in the moonlight to be sure that they were dyed, they streamed behind her like the golden locks of Velleda. Her attitude of eager expectation, resolute, unstudied, was that of a cat waiting patiently her opportunity to spring; her right hand held a long sharp knife, half concealed by the folds of her dress: her arms were bare: she wore a low dress, showing the white shoulders of which she was so proud. With the excitement of her wrath there had come back to her something of the brightness of her youth, and, tigerish as was her attitude, no one in Esbrough had ever seen her so beautiful as in this hour of anticipated revenge. Even in the days of nursery-governesshood, and sweet maidenly loveliness, Jenny was not so graceful, so bright-eyed, so lovely as on this Christmas evening, long after her beauty had been worn by the winters. Suddenly she saw standing before her—Norah. The girl, sensible of the danger she might encounter at the hands of a woman half mad with jealousy, did not assume the attitude dear to the imagination of strong-minded ladies who make speeches, and, impelled by a natural admiration of qualities not possessed by themselves, love to picture gentle womanhood, clothed in her own meekness and innocency. Far from it. Norah was quite prepared, even for an assault, and she was not afraid of it. As she stood before the yellow-haired fury, her hands were free for action,



and her eyes ready to catch the exigencies of the situation. She was, to begin with, in case the fury should assail her, a good head taller than her antagonist, and she had the strength of ten Jennys.

"What do *you* want here?" cried Mrs. Merrion, instinctively hiding the knife. "Why do you come to me? Have you not done mischief enough to me? I hate you. I hate you for your pretended goodness. . . . I hate you for taking Jack away from me."

"It is cold in the open air," said Norah calmly; "shall we talk inside?"

She passed by her, regardless of her hot breath and flaming eyes. Mrs. Merrion followed her without a word. Keziah and Myles planted themselves outside the door and listened, waiting for any sounds of violence. But there were none.

"You want to say something about Jack," Mrs. Merrion began. "Very well, say it, if you please, and go." She threw herself into a chair, and assumed the attitude of a listener. She was ashamed of the knife in her hand, too, and wanted to hide it. "Go on, Countess of Connaught," she sneered. "Countess of Connaught? Kitchen-maid of Connaught. If I'd known you were coming, I'd have got out the Irish whisky. Take a chair, if you like, and go on." This was very fine, but it had the disadvantage of being vulgar, and therefore out of place. The best things are sometimes thrown away by this kind of carelessness.

"I am going on, Mrs. Merrion," Norah replied. "First, had you not better put down that knife? It is dangerous."

Oblivious for the moment that it was a knife she had in her hand, Mrs. Merrion was fanning herself with the edge. She threw it on the floor impatiently. Norah did not take a chair. She stood. This gave her an advantage over the enemy. Her face was calm and her eyes grave. There was a look of resolution in them which daunted Mrs. Merrion.

"I am come to finish your threats against Mr. Armstrong. You have certain letters of his."

"Hundreds."

"You will give them all to me, at once."

"Will I?"

"And you will leave this place altogether, in two days."

"Shall I?"

"I am come here on purpose to tell you this. I should have come to-morrow, but I heard you were threatening wild things, so I came to-night."

"Jack is afraid to come, actually afraid to come, and so he sends his last new sweetheart."

"Will you please give me the letters?"

"No, I will not." Mrs. Merrion sprang to her feet. "I will not. How dare you ask for Jack's letters? Give you the letters? They shall be read in open court. All the world shall know"——

"Who and what Mrs. Merrion is."

Adelaide, or Jenny, turned pale for a moment.

"I know everything."

"Leave the room!" said Mrs. Merrion, with dignity; "leave my house!"

"Shall I show you that I know what and who you are. Listen. You were a nursery-governess; by name, Susan Jane. You left off being nursery-governess—but I will not tell you why. You never were married to any General Merrion at all; but I will spare myself and you the rest of your story, unless you force me."

"I will not give up Jack's letters. I will die first."

"Then to-morrow all the town will know your history, and if you bring an action against him, you shall have to tell, yourself, in open court, what that history is. You know best how you will stand that ordeal. Give me the letters and leave this place. Perhaps in the next town you go to no one will know it."

Norah stopped, because there was no need of more. It was an easy victory. Mrs. Merrion collapsed suddenly. Then, as unable to control her tears as her wrath, answered with a passionate fit of crying—"Oh! I love him," she lamented, "I love him. You don't understand how I love him. Jack, with his brown hair, and his bonny eyes, and

his sweet voice—oh! Jack, Jack, I wish I had died before I met you. Why was I born? What have I done? I was so happy before you came.”

“Where are the letters?” Norah asked calmly, with no anger or irritation in her voice, but only that cold resolution which subdued her rival.

Jenny pointed to the davenport, and fell in a heap on the floor, weeping and sobbing. Norah opened it. There was a bundle of letters so thick that her heart sank within her. They were tied up and superscribed, “All Jack’s letters.”

“Norah, leave me one,” cried the woman. But Norah would leave none at all. She put the whole bundle together in her pocket.

“Come, Mrs. Merrion,” she said kindly, “you will forget all this trouble, and you could never have married him.”

Mrs. Merrion rose slowly. She wiped her eyes, composed her face, and closed the desk. “I want no pity,” she said. “You have forced me to give up the letters. I shall leave this miserable town. Tell Jack that he will never see me again. And now go.” Norah left. Outside the door she found her father and Keziah. “Come, father,” she said, “this is not a place for us to stay in.”

Keziah shut the door and put up the chain. Then she went back to her cousin prepared for a scene. But there was no scene. Jenny was quite calm and composed.

“Come in, Keziah,” she said sweetly. “Don’t be terrified, my dear. Pick up that knife and put it away. I suppose I was mad after dinner. I sometimes am, I know, and then I do silly things, and frighten people. That was why you fetched over that Norah girl.”

“Yes, Jenny, that was the reason.”

“Well, never mind. I don’t know what made me such a fool about that boy Jack Armstrong. He’s a handsome lad; but you were right, cousin: he is too young for me. I’ve paid him out, though, because I’ve given all his letters to Norah. Fancy her reading them all through, every word. Won’t she let him have it in the morning? And when



they're married and things go wrong, won't she throw them in his teeth? I rather think, Keziah, his dearest Adelaide will be a rod in pickle for Master Jack to the end of his natural days. She'll lay it on, or I'm mistaken in her character. And as for him, I'm glad of it. It serves him right."

But it was not a rod in pickle at all. Jenny thought and spoke after the manner of her kind; Norah acted after the manner of hers. That is, she gave the letters to Jack without looking at so much as the signature to a single one.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"**A**ND now, Keziah," Mrs. Merrion said, drawing on her gloves, "I am going to do a great stroke of work. You will get in all the bills and pay them. You will tell the landlord that I am going away; you may arrange to sell all the heavy furniture. We shall flit, cousin Keziah; we shall go back to London. Ah! the dear old place! I shall be home to luncheon. Kidney sautés, my dear."

She drove straight to Mr. Bayliss's works. The great man was not there; then she laughed, and drove to his house. Paul Bayliss received her card with a curious expression. Ella was in the garden, or somewhere out of the way, for which he felt grateful, and he ordered the lady to be taken into his own study. He found her dressed as Mrs. Merrion knew how to dress—her sealskin jacket and bright ribbons showing off the fulness of her charms, and the delicate colours artistically displayed upon her fair cheeks. Her eyes, touched with a little bismuth, presented the appearance of recent tears. This was a very effective stroke.

"Adelaide!" said the great man. "This is unusual. And crying! What has happened?"

"You do not want me in your house. You come to mine: you can come to the poor young widow and—and steal away her heart."

"Adelaide! Pray explain yourself."

"My late husband's brother has written to me. He wants

me to go out to Baltimore. I am come here to know what I am to say."

"Say, Adelaide! Why, go by all means."

"And will you come after me—all that way?"

"Why, no. I hardly think"—

"I don't understand you, Mr. Bayliss. Do you mean that you have meant nothing all the time?"

"Why—really—Adelaide! We have had our little dinners and our pleasant evenings; but what more could I mean? You could not imagine that I was going to propose marriage?"

"Could not imagine, sir!—could not imagine!" The blue eyes flashed frenzy, as she threw back the veil from her face, and disclosed the golden tresses yet humid with the recent dye. "Could not imagine! Did you actually dare to come week after week to my house—the home of the widow of a Confederate General Officer, and dupe me with promises of undying affection, and then turn round upon her and say it was all pretence! Do you dare to say you meant nothing that day when I let you—I blush to own it—let you kiss my cheek! O Hector Washington Merrion!—if you were alive you would kill this man, as you killed the Northerner Colonel at Baltimore, because he dared to drink my health in Bourbon whisky at the bar." She sat down, and putting her handkerchief to her eyes, shed copious floods of tears, or at least seemed to do so to the elderly lover.

"My dear Ad—Adelaide."

"O Paul! Paul! how many more women's hearts are you going to break?"

He smiled. It is perhaps not unpleasant at fifty-five to be reminded that you are yet able to break many women's hearts.

"Adelaide, if I had known"—

"As if you could not have known. As if you could have thought that I, a poor weak, innocent creature, trustful to a fault, as the poor dear General always used to say, could be with you, and hear you, and even—even—O Paul!"—here she hid her face—"even kiss you, without thinking—without

feeling sure—O Paul! my heart will break, and I wish I could die.” The symptoms became alarming. Paul took her hand.

“My poor Adelaide—my dearest Adelaide”——

“He calls me dearest,” she murmured; “and yet he means nothing.”

“If I could calm you—soothe your feelings, my poor sensitive girl—soothe yourself.”

“I cannot—I cannot. It is too cruel!”

“Let us talk it over, Adelaide. Be reasonable, my dear. It is true that I—I love you,” he made a great gulp. “But consider, I am an old man.”

“No, Paul, no; not old.”

“And you are a young woman—a very young woman.”

She gave a little murmur of acquiescence.

“I am, besides, a widower. And I have a daughter. How, Adelaide, I ask, how could I ask that daughter to accept a second mother, not much older than herself?”

“You should have thought of all that before, Mr. Bayliss.”

“True, I should; but, Adelaide, you are the cause. Look at yourself in the glass, and ask yourself why.”

“Paul Bayliss, this is folly. Tell me in plain terms—will you marry me?”

“No, I will not, Mrs. Merrion. That is in plain terms, is it not?”

She shook him off, and stood up, flinging back her drapery with a gesture that meant business. “Then, Mr. Bayliss, there is but one course open to me. My London lawyer has been with me to-day.” This was a fib, but Paul Bayliss changed colour. “He has read your letters. He advised me, Paul Bayliss, to bring the case before a court of law;—with damages, I think he said. What does that mean?” she added innocently.

“Well, ma’am, I suppose you know, in spite of your crafty looks,” Bayliss replied, “damages mean money. You want to extort money from me, do you? Come, how much?”

“My lawyer,” replied the lady, looking modestly on the ground, “said that you were a very rich man, and must pay



for your amusements. Pretty amusement, to break a woman's heart."

"We've heard that before, Mrs. Merrion. Let us stick to business. And your lawyer thinks that with damages we might heal the wound?"

"You are cruelly sarcastic, Paul. He said ten thousand pounds."

"Ten thousand devils! Do you imagine, madam, that I am going"——

"Or else we would go into court with all our letters, and show Mr. Bayliss in his true colours—the gay Lothario! O Paul! it will be a dreadful thing to me, but a far more dreadful thing to you. Think of your philanthropy, my poor Paul, and your character for common sense, and your grand position in the town, and the respect in which all men hold you: think of that, and then see how awful it will be to stand up and hear all the letters read, one after the other. O Paul! my heart bleeds for you." Paul Bayliss pronounced a great and mighty oath. "Don't swear," said the lady, "because you are a churchwarden, and it's wrong." He swore again. "Paul Bayliss, it is a pity we should quarrel. Look here, now; I would willingly spare you annoyance, but I cannot possibly overlook your conduct. You *must* be punished somehow, Paul. It is bad for me to lose a rich husband, and so good a man as everybody says you are—very bad; but it is worse for you to let all the world know how you have treated a woman who trusted you. Shall Keziah Bastable go into the witness-box and tell of the little dinners that she used to cook for you every week? Keziah does not love you, my poor Paul. She remembers you when you were quite a poor man. She has often amused herself by telling me how you used to borrow Johnny Armstrong's money and wear his clothes, and how you had to make your wife do the housework because you were too poor to keep a servant. She told me once, but this I hardly believe, that you used at one time to take copying-work from a lawyer, and keep the accounts for the church, where her father was sexton and parish clerk. She will take a delight, this malicious Keziah,

in telling all the world these, among other painful things. O Paul! could you not even remember the prawn curries I used to give you with the Bombay ducks, and the pudding you were so fond of, flavoured with vanille! Have you forgotten my clear mulligatawny? Did you ever taste red mullet with such a sauce as mine? Where will you get the *bouillabaisse* that I alone know how to make? And think of the mayonnaise. Paul, there is still half-a-dozen of the dry champagne left, and four bottles of the Château margaux besides; and at least two dozen of the Corton. You gave them to me. You would like to send for them back again, perhaps? The Curaçoa and the Chartreuse are nearly all gone, and"—

"Confound the Curaçoa!" said Paul.

Mrs. Merrion sat down, and began to cry again.

"Stop it, Adelaide," said Paul. "My lawyer shall see you. We will buy you off; we will silence you, somehow."

"I am going to London, Mr. Bayliss," said Mrs. Merrion. "O Paul! what dreams of happiness have been shattered! Go; make love to some more fortunate woman. Let her believe you, if she can. Marry whom you will, and when you are tired of her, come back to your Adelaide, and you shall find the same mul—mul—mulligatawny, clear, and the same prawn curry, with the Bombay ducks."

She threw herself into his arms. At that moment the door opened and Mr. Clifton, the lawyer, came in. It was an interesting tableau. Mr. Bayliss, with a very red face, was trying to push from him the clinging form of the disconsolate dame, while she, one hand round his burly neck, was staunching the tears that seemed to flow from her pearly eyes with her pocket-handkerchief in the other hand.

"There—get off—leave me alone. Mr. Clifton, for God's sake, shut that door. If Ella were to see. Go away, Adelaide—I mean Mrs. Merrion. Take her away, Mr. Clifton—take her away!"

It so happened that Jack had only that morning communicated to Clifton the true history of his own imbroglio with the fair widow, so that the bystander looked on with an

expression of the keenest enjoyment. But he had the presence of mind to interfere. "Pray, Mrs. Merrion," he said.

"You are witness, sir. I call you to witness," the lady cried, with an astonishing alacrity, "that you have seen Mr. Bayliss embracing me."

"Pardon me, madam," he replied; "I am Mr. Bayliss's lawyer, and can see nothing." It was a bold stroke on the young solicitor's part. Bayliss caught at the expression.

"My lawyer, Mrs. Merrion. He will call and arrange with you. Take her away; do take her away."

Mr. Clifton led the weeping lady from the room, and Bayliss sunk back in a chair, wiping the signs of emotion from his brow. Mrs. Merrion left her conductor at the door, and refused his further escort. Outside the door a new thought struck her. She took the way to Captain Perrymont's. The captain, after an hour or two at the laboratory, was preparing to visit his works. He greeted Mrs. Merrion with a cheery salute.

"Aha, Mrs. Merrion! Come to see an old sailor? Shake hands, shake hands."

"This is not a visit of ceremony, Captain Perrymont."

"So much the better, so much the better. Glad my son is not at home, though. Must keep the young fellow out of mischief, you know. Might fall in love with blue eyes and yellow hair—eh? Not a usual combination, and, consequently, fetching. Every woman ought to aim like you, my dear Mrs. Merrion, and turn art to the improvement of nature."

"If you mean, Captain Perrymont, that I dye my hair"—

"My dear madam, what a cruel thing to say! Dye your hair, indeed. 'The yellow hair that Julia wears is hers, and who denied it! I know 'tis hers, and this I know, for I learned how she dyed it.' Martial, ma'am—freely imitated."

"Captain Perrymont, you are a wretch!"

"They used to tell me so thirty years ago, Mrs. Merrion; but I was younger then. Now I'm getting old, and I'm a wretch in another sense."



"You came and stole your letters, Captain Perrymont—the letters in which you promised to marry me!"

"Ho! ho! ho!" said the captain, laughing till his lean body shook all over. "The best stroke of business I ever did. I burned them, every one, Adelaide."

"You villain! And you call yourself a gentleman, I suppose?"

"I do indeed, Mrs. Merrion; and an old fool to boot."

"My lawyer has been with me this morning, Captain Perrymont."

"I'm devilish sorry for you, ma'am. I am, indeed. That's two guineas at least gone, and nothing to show for it."

"He advises me, Captain Perrymont, to bring the case before a court of law."

"Does he, indeed, Mrs. Merrion?"

"Will you keep your promise, and marry me?"

"I never made you a promise to marry you, and I will not marry you."

"Then I will bring an action."

"Bring a dozen, madam."

"Unless you consent to a compromise, Captain Perrymont. Dreadful as it is to my feelings, I am sure he is right, and I must not—I cannot—look over your shameful behaviour."

"Don't look it over, Mrs. Merrion. Look under it or any other way. And now, ma'am, I'm a sailor, and yet I am not quite a fool. Do you think that at my time of life I am going to pay black-mail?"

"Upon my word, Captain Perrymont," Jenny replied, with admiration, "I believe you are the only man among them all."

"Don't know what you mean, Adelaide."

"Let us have peace. Look here, my old salt," her tone dropped easily into the colloquial English affected by ladies slightly below the rank of life into which generals of the army usually marry, "let us be friends. Now I'm going to leave this stupid old place and go back to London. Why I ever came here I do not know. And you will call upon me, will you?"

"Will I, Adelaide? Of course I will. And I'll come up to London on purpose. What a witch it is! I say, Adelaide," here he dropped his voice to a whisper, "I suppose it's all bunkum about the Confederate General, isn't it?"

"Come and dine with me in London," she returned, laughing, and showing her white teeth. "And, Captain," she laid her hand on his arm, and looked up in his face with a sentimental sigh, "send me some more of that old port, will you? It is little indeed that I am able to take myself, but that Keziah has drank it all up."

Only Clifton and Mr. Bayliss know the awful sum which the latter paid to keep Mrs. Merrion quiet. The latter swears still whenever he thinks of it. It was indeed an excellent morning's work, and Jenny took her *rognon sautés* for luncheon with unusual relish after it.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

IN the good old days, when the play had a dozen scenes instead of three, as at present, the scene before the last was always a short "carpenter's scene." This is my carpenter's scene.

After the departure of Mrs. Merrion, Paul Bayliss had another visitor. He walked in without the ceremony of sending in a card, and grasped the great man's hand with an easy familiarity, which would have made the footman's calves to dissolve. He even kept the hand in his own and pressed it with the fervour of old friendship.

"What cheer, mate?" he asked. "Hearty? That's right! Two days ago you were all in the doldrums, glass down, rainy weather, no breeze aft, breakers ahead—eh? That's what they say abroad. Lord! I learned the sailor's talk when I sailed from California to Honolulu; and nothing done when I got there—waste of time, governor, like everything else. But there, everything works round for the best; and now you've got Doctor Bastable, old Ben Bastable, who knows all the secrets of Nature, and a good many that ain't

quite what might be called Nature—you'll be all right. Bless you ! I practised physic out in the west for a year, till the editor lost his two children and his wife under my treatment, he said ; then I had to dig out. Now let's go into this little difficulty."

"What little difficulty, Mr. Bastable?"

Paul Bayliss was a very big man, and, standing on his hearthrug, while his visitor sat on a low chair almost at his feet, had very considerably the advantage.

"Difficulty? Why, man alive, what should I mean?"

"Pray explain yourself, Mr. Bastable."

Benjamin Bastable began to perceive that there was something unexpected. The approach of misfortune is like that of rain, heralded always by a cold wind. "I mean," he said, dropping his voice to a whisper, "I mean, the deed."

"What deed?"

"I mean the forgery, then," he cried, springing to his feet, "if you will have it."

Bayliss met it with a front of brass. "Forgery!—what forgery?"

"What forgery? Yours, man. Yours, yours, yours. Do you hear—your forgery of my name!"

"Bastable, you rave, or you are drunk. Explain yourself."

For an answer Bastable seized his hat and rushed out of the house. He ran, swearing like an American skipper, to the office of young Clifton, the lawyer. "I've seen him," he said, "the old fox. I've seen him, and he tries to back out. But I will be even with him. Do what you like, sir. Proclaim it in all the streets, and I will swear to it. The deed's a forgery."

"What deed, Mr. Bastable?"

"What you showed me . . . . O Lord! O Lord! Here's pretty villainy."

"I showed you a paper with some writing. I asked you if a certain name was in your hand."

"Did man ever hear the like?" cried the bewildered Benjamin. Bit by bit he told his tale.

Mr. Clifton was young, but he had the craft and subtlety



of the serpent, therefore he assumed the tone of virtue. "So, sir, you left us under the impression that you had discovered a forgery, out of which you could make capital, did you? You went to Mr. Bayliss, hoping to buy his silence, and you find you cannot. And where is your forgery? Upon my word, sir, you are likely to get yourself in a very pretty scrape."

The man sat on a chair, and dropping his hat on the floor, looked volumes—intricate and unintelligible volumes; treatises of metaphysics.

"What will you do now, Mr. Bastable?"

"I've been tricked."

"On the contrary, you wanted to trick others. Now, sir," Clifton shook an ominous forefinger in his face, "dare to repeat outside what you have said here, and you shall have two years for libel."

"It's hard," said Bastable. "I made his fortune; I found the iron for him."

"And now you accuse him of a crime. Mr. Bayliss has no further cause, at any rate, for gratitude. Come, Bastable, I suppose you are hard up. Suppose I advance you a trifle to go away with?"

"Aha! you want me to go."

"Or suppose I bring you up for deserting your wife, eh? I can get a warrant out in half an hour."

"How much?" said the worthy logician, after a few moments of calm argument in his own bosom. "It's a rummy ramp—but how much?"

It is the last scene; the scene in which there is little to say but plenty to look at. A gigantic banquet. A supper to all Mr. Bayliss's workmen, given by himself on New Year's Day. He takes the chair. On his right is Jack Armstrong; on his left is Mr. Fortescue: Captain Perry-mont, Frank Perry-mont, and the notables are at the high table: below sit the thousand workmen. They drink the health of the master. Presently he rises. He is big and burly; he looks a master every inch; he is loud-voiced,

jovial, and confident. He makes the best speech of his life; he reminds the men how fifteen years back Esbrough had been but a miserable market-town; how the desolate beach had no docks; how the streets had no life, and in a sudden burst of eloquence he called upon them to look at the town he had himself erected. He took all the credit to himself—every bit. He was the father of the town—the founder of the modern Chicago.

“But, my friends,” he went on, “I am growing old. Besides, I have a duty to fulfil. Here sits one”—he laid his hand on Jack’s shoulder—“whom you all know. Whose son is he?—Johnny Armstrong’s! Who were the Armstrongs? You Esbrough men know that here sits the last descendant of the race. It is right that in the risen fortunes of the place which once his people owned, he himself should have a share. And what share? The share that I, his father’s partner in less prosperous times, can give him. Friends all, here is your new master. Jack Armstrong is king; I resign. Leave me the evening of my days for good works. The firm will be as of old, ‘Armstrong, Bayliss, and Co.’ Henceforth I come to the works as a visitor only.”

There was dead silence for a few moments, and then a great shout! In the midst of it rose an old man, Jack’s first doctor, and held up his hand. “Jack Armstrong’s health,” he cried, in a voice that did credit to septuagenarian lungs. “Stop one moment. I propose it because I am the man who saw him first. In the factory he was born, with the flames of the furnace for the first light that he saw; in the factory he has lived; in the factory he shall go on working. He is our child—an Esbrough man!—and we are proud of him. Drink all, after me—Health and happiness and prosperity to—THIS SON OF VULCAN.”

[January, 1887.]



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